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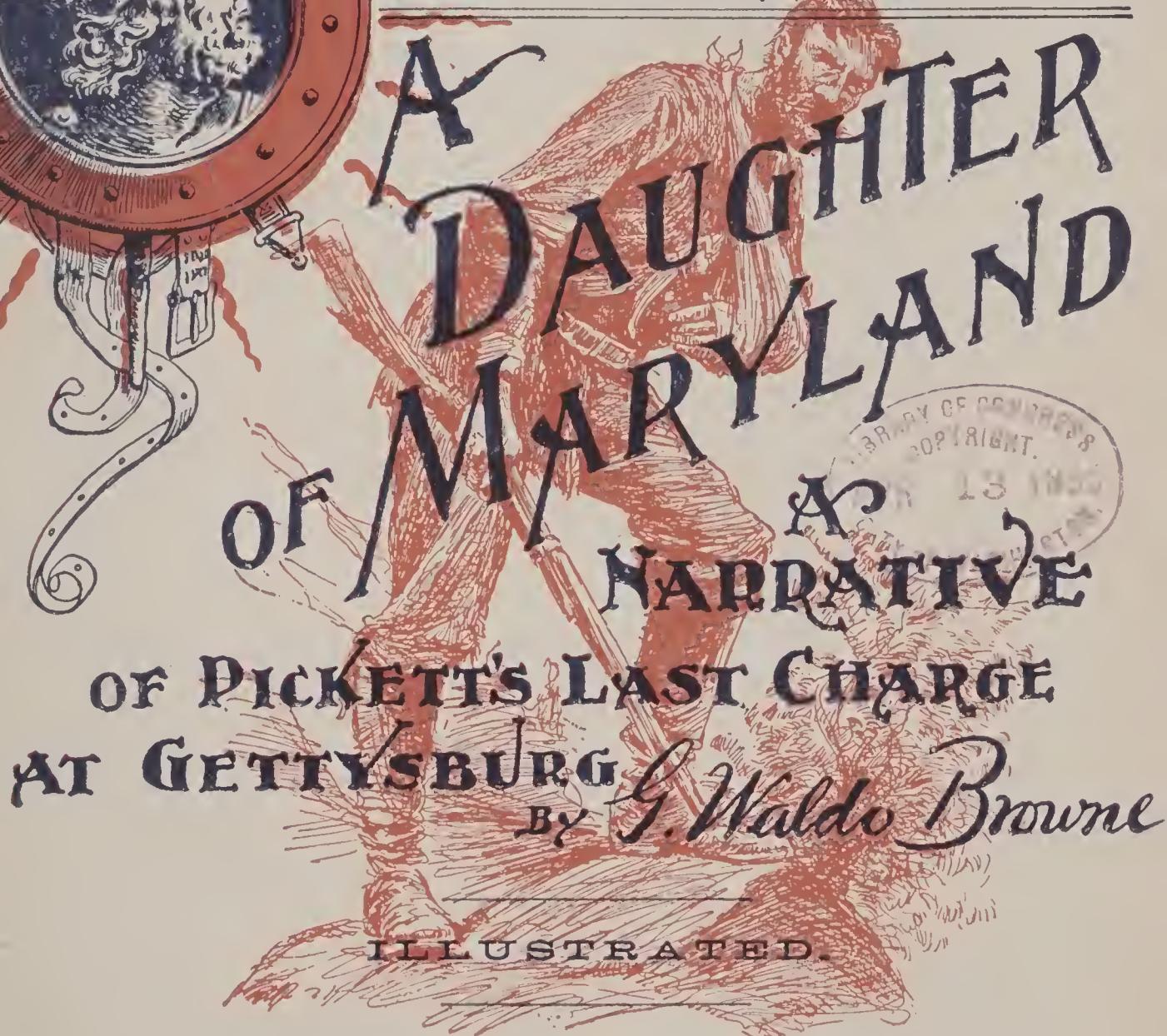
THE WAR SERIES

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His eyesight suddenly left him, and with a dizziness he had never known before he staggered forward and dropped to the ground unconscious.

See page 165.

A Daughter of Maryland.

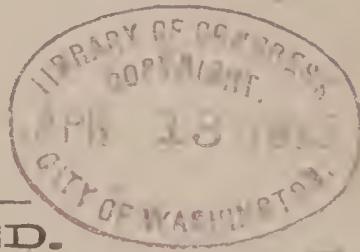
A NARRATIVE OF

Pickett's Last Charge at Gettysburg.

A NOVEL.

BY G. WALDO BROWNE.

ILLUSTRATED.



NEW YORK:
NOVELIST PUBLISHING CO.,
61 BEEKMAN STREET.

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TO THE
GALLANT VETERANS OF GETTYSBURG
THIS VOLUME IS
RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED
BY THE
A U T H O R.

PREFACE.

WITH nearly a third of a century filling in the void of years reaching back to that thrilling epoch, he who was a mere boy at the time of the great war drama of modern age ought to be able to write calmly and dispassionately of the trying times he has attempted to describe in the following pages. He certainly has no desire to jumble history for the sake of a good story, nor to gloss over the mistakes or magnify the glory of any of its participants. Whatever of dialogue is given must be read with a realization that it represents not the opinions of this late day, but the natural impressions belonging to the real actors of that dark period. He believes there were good men and true who wore the gray, and true men and good in the uniforms of blue. That there were patriots in the South is evidenced by the calm assurance and good feeling with which they accepted the result of the struggle and set about without a murmur to repair their shattered hopes and fortunes, doing this with all the zeal of their victorious brothers. General Lancier belonged to this class, and a thorough Southron at heart he was a staunch upholder of what he believed was for the common weal. Thus in his defeat he proved himself a victor.

The undersigned believes he has faithfully depicted that grand charge of Pickett's men according to the most reliable accounts. It *was* a grand charge, viewed in whatever light falls upon the shifting scene of battle, and every way worthy of a comparison to the heroic struggle of the Old

Guard of Waterloo. In the brave old 72d Pennsylvania the Virginia heroes met foemen worthy of their steel. It seemed a fitting climax to the magnificent drama that the outcast of Sylvania and his despised rival should be the ones to lead and stem the tide of battle. Gallant Armistead fell as I have described, though he lived to be borne from the field by Union men and cared for by General Hancock, his old companion in arms of the United States army, until he died on the following day. It seems remarkable that he who formed and commanded this great charge should have come out of it unscathed. But all this has been told many times.

Sylvania long since recovered from the ravages of war, and is to-day as it was in the days of old, one of the finest homesteads in western Maryland. Though the general several years since was called upon to answer to that long roll, containing the names of nearly all of his illustrious companions, the estate still remains in the family name and unshorn of its dignity. Graymont was soon repaired and restored to its old time splendor. It is now the happy home of our soldier hero and those loved ones that make it the happiest place on earth. There is another home in New England that should not be forgotten by us, as it will never be by its Southern friends. May the children of these households never be called to witness a repetition of such scenes as were participated in by their parents, and long ere the surviving veterans of those times have woven their last chaplet above the graves of their fallen comrades may the wraith of the millions slain in battle be gladdened by a congress of arbitration to settle disputes, and the angel of peace close forever the record of the god of war. Then shall we wreath with the laurels of the sword the sword itself.

THE AUTHOR.

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A DAUGHTER OF MARYLAND.

CHAPTER I.

THE SIGHTLESS SENTRY—SYLVANIA—AN ALARM.

“HALT! who comes here?”

It was a beautiful day in early autumn, 1863; nature's favors resting like a benison of peace on the battle-scarred hills and valleys of Western Maryland, which had so recently throbbed beneath the floodtide of invading armies—where even then the trailing garments of war hung over the loftiest peaks of South Mountains. The startling challenge, uttered in a hollow, supernatural tone, broke in on the melody of a myriad of minor life like a discordant note in the strains of some sweet song. The wavering treble of a feathered songster, that for the past half hour had been making merry a leafy coppice near the foot of the height, suddenly ceased and the whir of tiny wings bespoke the singer's flight. A squirrel, flitting swiftly from bough to bough of a neighboring oak, let fall the nut he had been holding between his hairy cheeks until they had seemed ready to burst, and skurried away to his home in a hollow pine. A busy bee that had kept up a continual buzzing as it flew hither and thither on what seemed a fruitless errand, abruptly ended his monotonous ditty and dropped mysteriously out of sight; while overhead a lone hawk, on the alert for an unwary victim, gave a shriek of alarm and soared aloft into a higher and wider circle of reconnaissance.

The voice had apparently issued from a huge pile of bowlders heaped above a narrow defile cutting in twain the mountain range, for no person was in sight on the side of ascent. Neither was there any one to be seen in the pass-way below, though after a moment's silence a measured tone, with something of triumph in its ring, gave forth the reply :

“Captain Esten Berners of Pickett’s Old Guard of Gettysburg and his loyal men.”

Then the voice from the rocks said :

“Advance, Captain Berners, and give the password.”

“To the brave belong the honors.”

“‘Tis well.”

Immediately following this spirited enunciation, a tall, soldierly figure emerged from behind the rocky barrier and stood where the sunlight played on his bronzed and bearded features set grimly toward the pathway at his feet. His body was thrown slightly forward and head turned side-wise, in that attitude one assumes when listening for an expected sound. A flaw of wind turning and twisting the browned leaves of the oak alone broke the silence of the scene ; but the measured tread of marching feet must in some mysterious way have reached his ears, for he exclaimed in the tone of one speaking to himself, while a smile overspread his countenance :

“What music there is in that martial step !”

Clad in a tattered garb of gray hanging loosely about his emaciated figure, his left arm in a sling, his right hand clutching at the long throat of a rusty firearm with pan blown out and breech in splinters, it would require no grievous strain of the imagination to think him some grim wraith of war risen from the rocks to haunt that peaceful spot with his fateful presence. This idea was sure to be intensified by the fact that the orbs turning restlessly beneath the reddened lids were devoid of sight.

When he had listened several moments, slowly turning

his head the while in the direction of the imaginary retreat, the smile on his features was succeeded by their habitual gloom, and he left the place with the slow, uncertain steps of one who is blind, though feeling his way along the rugged pathway with the surety of him who is familiar with every crook and obstacle in his course. Reaching the mountain road at the foot of the declivity, he moved on toward the open country at a rapid gait, without turning his head to the right or left, the sound of his footsteps deadened by the sand of the highway.

Emboldened by the silence, the squirrel peered out from his covert. Seeing his natural enemy disappearing in the distance, he began anew his sportive faces, his joy soon doubled by the appearance of his mate. The defiant chatter of this twain, the signal for the wildwood singer to resume his lay, the coppice again rang with the melody of innocent song; the bee once more flitted furiously to and fro with his steady buzzing; while far up on the hazy sky the hawk descended into a lower and smaller orbit of flight.

Unmindful of the humbler parts played around him, the sightless sentinel continued to plod along the dusty road, past broken-down fences and disordered fields, past deserted houses where everything was in ruins, past a colony of negro huts overhung with an air of desolation, past a vast estate of the colonial era, the grand old mansion of its whilom owner looming up in a gloomy silence at the end of a wide driveway bordered with a double colonnade of trees now decimated by the ruthless ax of him who had felled them to build a breastwork before the door of the abandoned home—past all this vividly pictured to his mind's eye, his halting steps finally bringing him to the doorway of a plain dwelling standing near the edge of a fragment of woods. Here he paused, casting his first backward glance, while he said in a dreary monotone:

“Not forever this darkness; not forever this desolation; to the brave belong the honors, to the loyal the reward.”

Entering then the dilapidated house, he closed the door behind him, not to appear again until another day should call him forth to hold his lonely vigil at the mountain gateway, and to pass in review as he had done so many times before his phantom troops.

Wouldst know the history of this strange anchorite? Wouldst lift the cloud that darkens these homes and this landscape? Then, turn back with me three pages in the book of years—only three—years that merely measure the brief transition period of infancy—years that fickle memory does not take into account in her balance sheet of a life. Three years! Time enough to rob the fairest cheek of its rose, to weave threads of silver in tresses of brown, to divide households, to make enemies of brothers, haters of lovers, to rend asunder the bonds of a great government, to change the grainfields of Antietam's smiling valley into the battle-ground of mighty armies.

“Sylvania,” the homestead of the Lanciers for several generations, was most happily situated on the eastern border of the Antietam Valley. A serried background was formed by the mountains, over whose bold crags and ever-green terraces the morning sun flung its first radiance of glory and on whose purple peaks the last rays of daylight played with the fantastic shadows below. Down the mountain side sparkling cascades leaped merrily from mossy retreats, to swell into clear, pebble-strewn streams that banded the lowlands like so many silvery ribbons on the fair bosom of nature. Looking westward the beholder gazed on a wide area of green-clad meadows, waving fields of grain and dark patches of forest.

A typical old Maryland manor built in the days of the Calverts, the house was a long, low structure of brick, standing upon a slight eminence, with a row of stately elms planted by the founder of the estate in front of the door. Below these trees was a lawn of half a dozen acres terraced in the English style, either end of these terraces marked by

huge catalpas shading rustic seats. The entrance to these grounds was made through a forest of oaks and chestnuts, upon leaving which the driveway was overhung by the interlocking branches of double rows of beeches, footpaths leading off to the right and left at regular intervals.

The estate consisted of several hundred acres, and though somewhat broken on the eastern side was one of the richest to be found in the state. The present incumbent, Major Lancier, was the owner of over two hundred slaves, whose labor had developed the resources of the plantation. The houses of these negroes, sufficient in number to form a small town, was in plain sight of the manor, while a little to one side of them was the more pretentious home of the overseer.

Major Lancier prided himself upon his fine stock of horses, famous throughout that part of the country under the name of "The Oaks." Chief among these was his spirited, slender-limbed, fleet-footed stallion, Oak, whom no person on the place dared to mount but himself. Besides this beautiful but vicious steed were gentler horses for riding, matched pairs for driving, and heavier ones for the farm work. A well-ordered stable stood just to the east of the manor, while near by a carriage house contained a varied assortment of vehicles suited to the needs of a gentleman of leisure, his family and attendants.

Various offices were arranged within convenient distances of the mansion, prominent among them being the stone smokehouse, where quarters of mast-fed hogs hung from the roof, and in pits below were slow-burning fires tended by gray-headed negroes, whose faces covered with soot and grease were rendered unnaturally black. Further removed were a set of housings of no secondary importance to at least one member of the Lancier family, and he the major's adopted son, Robert. These buildings were the kennels of as fine a lot of foxhounds as any sport-loving Marylander could desire. And if the acme of Major

Lancier's happiness lay in cantering over his broad domains on the back of his loved Oak, then young Robert was equally certain to find his supremest pleasure in a wild chase across the country with his tireless hounds upon the trail of a fugitive fox.

As may be easily understood Sylvan Manor was noted for its hospitality, and its lord and master, if bluff and often severe in his speech, was universally liked. Robert, the son in name—nephew by kin, was less outspoken but if possible more set in his ways. One other member made up the household—a daughter, well worthy of the proud name of Lancier and that of her sainted mother, who had died when she was a child.

Robbed of a mother's gentle care, with a liberal allowance of her sterner parent's self-willed nature, it was natural Aurian should have developed certain traits of her father's dictatorial manner. But if inclined to rule rather than to obey, her government was tempered with such sweetness and grace of beauty that no one felt like rebelling against her power. Major Lancier was justly proud of his daughter, whom he was wont to declare possessed "just the right mixture of Lancier and Aurian, of storm and sunshine, to make a perfect woman." He believed it. What she did was right in his eyes, and she always did what she pleased, so the fact that she was not a spoiled child proves that she had a well-balanced mind as well as a loyal heart.

It was the major's pet scheme that Robert and Aurian should marry at the proper time. It would save a division of the old estate, which a Lancier always dreaded. But it must not be supposed that he had no higher motive. "I told sister Rosamond that Robert should be treated as a son by me, and so he shall be; but I cannot think of sacrificing Sylvania. I have it! He must marry my daughter, and there will be no need of having two fox-hunters where there is one. Demme! what am I saying? She is too good for him. And he—lucky dog!"

If the young couple had any intentions of carrying out the major's plan it had not been manifested by them, and he was twenty-two and she nineteen. Given their own good time, hearts will speak when lips are dumb.

On a particularly sultry September day the master of Sylvania was called to Annapolis on business; then Robert declared that notwithstanding the heat it was necessary to give his hounds an outing that afternoon, and without delay he started for the woods, leaving Aurian at home alone with the servants.

But this was not an unusual situation for her, and she gave less thought to it than she did to the oppressive atmosphere.

"I don't see how Robert can go racing after those half-wild dogs to-day. Why! it seems more like midsummer than early autumn. Get me my book, Furah, and we will go down to our favorite catalpa. It looks deliciously cool there."

"An' look! missus, I berrily b'lieve it am goin' to be cooler fer dat cloud soon hide dat sun."

Aurian saw with surprise that within a few minutes a dark rim of clouds had risen above the mountain range, fret-working the western horizon with its irregular peaks.

"There is going to be a storm, Furah, and it is coming up rapidly. Tell Mrs. Ralston to see that the house is put in order as soon as possible. I hope Robert will get home before—my! who is that coming up the road at such break-neck speed. It can't be Robert."

"It's S'posen Jones, missus! I sh'u'd know dat bob-up ob his'n cl'an outen sight."

"Well, you hasten to Mrs. Ralston with my message, and I will meet S'posen at the gate. What can have happened that he rides like that? Perhaps Robert has met with an accident—got thrown from his horse. How I tremble!"

Though immediately losing sight of the road as she ran down the pathway, she was enabled to mark the advance of

the rider by the dense cloud of dust that arose above him, leaving a gray streak behind as he came madly on.

Aurian had barely reached the gate between two gnarled old beeches guarding the entrance to the grounds, when the oncoming rider dashed furiously up to the spot. Catching sight of Miss Lancier he stopped the headlong gait of his horse with an abruptness that not only threw the animal back upon its haunches but sent him flying heels over head to the earth.

“What *has* happened, S’posen Jones? Have you lost what little black wit you had?”

“‘Scuse me, Missus Orry; I ’spect I did cut a figger comin’ up de road dat way. Golly! dat air tum’le did shake me up ‘mensously. S’pec’ I break my t’ick head one ob dese days.”

He had not hinted that his wild ride had any more serious object than a caprice of his heedless nature, and with a breath of relief she said :

“What a fright you gave me, S’posen, riding as if something dreadful had happened. Don’t you ever let me know of you doing that again. On such a day as this, too; you will ruin the horse. Take him to the stable at once; and mind you that he has a good grooming. Be about it lively, and see that the doors are all closed. A storm is coming up very fast.”

S’posen Jones stood for a moment like one bewildered, and several times he seemed about to speak; but finally ducking his head he started in the direction of the stable, leading the overdriven horse by the rein.

“What a thoughtless set they are!” exclaimed Miss Lancier, as she started back toward the mansion. “I wonder what would become of them should they be thrown on their own resources. I don’t know but father is right after all and that they are better off as slaves than they would be as freemen. They certainly know very little of the cares and burdens of life.”

Upon reaching the more elevated position in front of the mansion, she found that the storm cloud was fast enveloping the western sky like the dark wave of a wind-riven sea. The little air stirring before had completely died away. The falling of an acorn upon the graveled walk jarred unpleasantly upon the ear made sensitive by the unnatural silence. At one point the dark, ethereal mass had broken apart and she fell to watching the jagged divisions, which soon began to surge back toward each other, seeming to her vivid imagination the shadowy outlines of two armies about to engage in battle. She fancied the bolder and partially detached shapes were the captains of the warring elements, and one particularly prominent figure was fast assuming a startling resemblance to a horse and rider, when she was aroused from her reverie by the sound of heavy footsteps close behind her. Looking swiftly around she was surprised to find S'posen Jones confronting her, his dusky-hued visage having an unwonted paleness and his eyes rolling fearfully.

“ ‘Deed, Missus Orry, I didn’t mean to. “ ‘Twas dat tum’le dat cl’an knocked de sense out ob dis woolly head; ‘deed ‘twas.”

“ What is it? What has happened, S’posen? You act as if you had been frightened almost to death.”

“ So I has, missus; so I has. I s’pec’ Uncle Fros’ is cl’an dead ober de ribber by dis time, an’ aunty, she tell me to ride like de win’ an’ fin’ yo’, an’ dat yo’ come to him ter wunst. He got sumthin’ berry ‘portant to say.”

“ What do you mean, S’posen? Is Uncle Frost worse? Does he want me to come and see him?”

“ Dem’s de berry words he used, missus. Yo’ see he took berry much wuss dis forenoon, an’ don’ lib long. He says he mus’ see yo’ ter wunst. I rid like de win’ to git hyur.”

“ Why didn’t you tell me then?”

“ ‘S’cuse me, Missus Orry. I don’ ‘spec’ ‘twas dat tum’le an’ dat look yo’ gub me dat knocked de ‘membrance out ob my woolly head. ‘Deed I’se sorry——’

Aurian stopped him with a wave of her hand. Uncle Frost was a well-known person to her, being a free negro living about six miles from Sylvan Manor on the road leading through South Mountains along what was called "Wind River Valley." Notwithstanding their different stations in life, a strong friendship had existed between them as long as she could remember. She had known of his illness, and had intended to visit him at the first favorable opportunity.

"You say Uncle Frost is very much worse, S'posen, and that he sent special word for me to come at once?"

"Dat's de solemn fac', missus; an' I cl'an fergit——"

"Put the bridle and saddle on Maze as quickly as possible and bring him to the door, while I get ready to start. You are to go with me upon Gyp. Now move lively for once in your life, for we must hasten if we would get there before the storm."

"Sart'in, missus; I'll hev Maze here in a jiffy," ducking his head and shambling away in the direction of the stable.

CHAPTER II.

ADVENTURE AND LOVE.

DISAPPEARING into the house as she gave her last order to S'posen, Aurian soon reappeared in her close-fitting riding habit and jaunty cap, looking it seemed more beautiful than before. She was pleased to find that the sluggish African had acted with unusual celerity for him and that he was actually leading her favorite horse to the door.

"Didn't I tell you to take Black Gyp and come with me?"

"'Deed yo' did, Missus Orry; an' I'm goin' back arter him like de win', as soon as I see yo' fair self safely mounted."

"You need not stop for that. Let me have Maze's rein. Now hasten and get Gyp and follow me. If Robert gets home before I come back, Furah, tell him where I have gone. Help Mrs. Ralston look after the house in case it rains. The clouds look brighter and they may break away yet."

She had already sprung lightly into the saddle, and touching the spirited Maze lightly, she was borne down the pathway at a smart canter.

"How dat gal do ride!" exclaimed Furah, watching her mistress, with a broad smile on her dusky features. "I s'pec's nuffin but she git her neck broke or twisted, which is wuss, one ob dese days. I wonder whar dat lazy S'posen gone now. Dis am de 'casion w'en I mus' settle dat word wid him."

She must have had an extended search for her darky lover, or the settlement of "dat word" had required a long argument, for it was fully fifteen minutes later when she ran into the house and he rode away on the back of Black Gyp.

In her anxiety to reach the home of Uncle Frost, Miss Lancier did not give a second thought to her laggardly attendant, but dashed down the Sharpsburg turnpike at such furious speed as to call upon her surprised looks of all whom she met or passed on the way. But leaving the main highway about a mile below Sylvania and following the crossroad leading along the winding, lonely valley of Wind River, where the way was almost constantly overhung on the one hand by frowning mountain ridges and on the other flanked by the deep, rocky bank of the stream, with a precipitous wall of granite rising beyond, now climbing steep ascents, anon descending dizzy declivities, she was obliged to often slacken Maze's speed to a walk.

Standing out in bold relief on the left hand at the entrance to this mountain defile were huge rocks piled one above another in such positions as to form upon a gigantic scale the almost perfect outlines of a human face, no part being wanted to make up the features of this rugged countenance which had been named "The Stone Sentinel," and the passway at its base "The Sentinel's Gateway."

Beyond this mute image that side of the ascent fixing the boundary of the defile was generally covered with a growth of stunted pines, the dark eave green of their foliage giving a gloomy aspect to the scene. On the other hand, its deep flank splashed by the sparkling current of the river, which had at places undermined its adamantine side to an extent that large basins had been scooped out of the solid rock and filled with seething waters, rose a high, perpendicular barrier of granite, broken at intervals by deep fissures and caverns of unknown depth. Over this wrinkled visage, seamed and scarred by ages of passive resistance to sun and

storm, heat and cold, had crept a network of vines and dwarfed growths of hazels, briarwood and evergreen shrubs, until the rugged lines of the dreary wall had been softened and the ugly rents concealed by this wildwood drapery. In the depths of this miniature forest and the fissures and recesses of the rocks a myriad of humbler lives reigned supreme, unintimidated by the presence of man. In the crystal stream reflecting the glory of mountain and sky, the sportive trout played hide and seek, or slept in the shadow of the overhanging cliff, where he was safe from the keenest vision; on the loftiest crag the hawk had its eyrie and reared its young undisturbed, while in the lower network of growth smaller birds built their nests beyond the reach of the boldest climber; along the swaying vines and branches the squirrel scampered with fearless chatter; in its crevices the fussy bees stored their golden treasures secure unto themselves; in the deeper pits the stealthy fox found safe refuge when tired of his raids; on the exposed angles of bare rock the lazy snake sunned himself and slept the day away; while in the shadows of some cavern the owl looked wise and blinked.

The mountain shutting out the western sky from her view, Aurian could no longer note the progress of the rising storm, had she felt like doing so. She was thinking more of him she was hastening to see, and wondering if she would be too late. Growing more anxious as she advanced, upon reaching the top of a higher ascent than she had previously made, she was about to urge Maze into a quicker gait, when she was surprised by the appearance of a man who had stepped from the growth by the wayside into the middle of the narrow road.

The cry of alarm upon her lips was checked, however, and she stopped her horse abruptly, as she recognized the unexpected person.

“Why, Esten Berners! how you frightened me. Is it thus you waylay your friends?”

"Excuse me, Miss Aurian; I did not mean to frighten you. But whither are you bound in such haste, if I may ask?"

"Uncle Frost is very much worse, and he sent me word that he wanted to see me once more."

"But a hurricane is coming up fast. See! from this elevated position we can see its advance column. You must return home with all speed possible."

"Nonsense! I can reach Uncle Frost's cabin in less time, and once there I shall escape a drenching, as if that was such a dreadful thing. I would not miss seeing him."

"There is another reason why you should not keep on," he said, laying one hand on Maze's head and looking earnestly into Aurian's countenance. "The recent rains have so swollen Wind River that it has nearly undermined the bridge abutments so the structure hangs trembling above the foaming strain. It is certainly not safe to cross it even on foot. Why! it scarcely seemed capable of bearing my weight, to say nothing of a horse and rider."

"S'posen Jones crossed it in safety within an hour."

"I saw him, and expected the black imp would be sent to his destruction. The horse he rode is lighter than yours, besides the supports are growing weaker every moment. Let me go on to Uncle Frost's with any errand you may send, while you return home."

"I thank you, Mr. Berners, for your kindness; but I feel it is imperative I should keep on."

"Then I will accompany you, at least as far as the bridge. I can easily keep up with you over this beastly road."

Aurian could not very well refuse the courteous offer, though she would have preferred very much to go on alone. She had known Esten Berners from early childhood, he being the son of her father's overseer. Mr. Berners, senior, was a coarse, illiterate person, with a very exalted opinion of his own qualities. Why her father had looked

to him for counsel and assistance, treating him more like a confidant than an employē, ever since he had come into possession of Sylvania, was a mystery to her. She could not help feeling a deep repugnance for the man, though she could not deny his faithfulness to his employer or his humane treatment of those under him. She had tried to overcome her dislike for him in vain.

Esten was exactly the opposite of his father in appearance and manner and taste. He was tall, slenderly limbed, had flaxen hair, a fair skin, blue eyes, and features of a decidedly Saxon type. He had a dreamy temperament, theoretical rather than practical, and seemed forever contemplating the improbable and impossible. With no other companion than his gun he had been known to bury himself in the fastnesses of the mountains for weeks at a time. He was an apt scholar, having been educated in the same schools with Robert Lancier, graduating at the head of the class, while the heir of Sylvania had naturally found the opposite end. All these characteristics, it was said, he had inherited from his mother, whom Aurian could not remember. In fact, all she had ever been able to learn of her was the simple statement that the young wife had mysteriously disappeared from her home when Esten was a child and never been seen or heard from afterward.

The same age of Robert Lancier and thrown much into each other's company, they had never professed any special friendship; but young Berners was desperately in love with his sister. It is true tongue had never told this—at least his had not—but that language that does not need words, the thousand and one little suggestions, the eye, the cheek, the lip, the hand, each had told its tender story though tongue had held its peace.

Aurian had long since read his secret, and in her woman's way had helped him keep it, by adroitly turning the drift of conversation into other channels at those moments when the confession he would have been glad to

make was only waiting a favorable opportunity for expression. With that strange intuition we cannot fathom, but is none the less unerring, she anticipated it was the subject now uppermost in his mind, and that she would have to resort to sharper tactics than common to avert the crisis. She felt this without realizing how completely she was to throw herself into his power.

Very much to her surprise he descended the hill in silence, refraining from speaking until they had reached the bridge spanning the river, which here shifted its course to the opposite side of the gorge.

The water was running uncommonly high, so the frothing tongues of the flood licked the bridge stringers.

"Let me cross before you venture upon it," said Esten Berners, stepping upon the weakened structure, as she stopped Maze at its edge. Then he crossed over, the bridge swaying and trembling beneath his footsteps.

"It is growing weaker every moment," he shouted back, loud enough for Aurian to hear him above the sullen roar of the stream; "and I think it will not do for you to cross with your horse. Wait a moment until I can——"

A peal of thunder at that instant exploded like a shell on the distant mountain peak. It was the first gun of the advancing storm.

Miss Lancier was in the act of dismounting, when her horse gave a snort of terror and plunged madly forward, nearly unseating her by its frenzied movement. The reins slipped through her hands, but she managed to save herself from falling, while a deafening crash rang in her ears and she felt herself and horse carried downward.

That end of the bridge had fallen beneath the weight of the terrified animal, though the opposite supports had not completely broken away. The raging flood swept over the doomed structure, and Maze's feet slipping on the wet inclined planks the struggling horse fell upon its knees.

Esten Berners had witnessed the startling scene with a

cry of horror, and regardless of the peril he was incurring he rushed to the rescue of his companion. The swaying bridge now hung at an angle which made it difficult as well as dangerous for him to advance, but he reached the horse just as it regained its feet, flinging its rider from the saddle by its wild efforts.

Fortunately Aurian was flung toward her rescuer, who caught her in his arms and beat a hasty retreat, the horse leaping up the slanting plankway ahead of him.

Esten Berners barely gained *terra firma* as the last timber yielded with a loud crash, and the wreck was swept away on the stormy bosom of its destroyer. He was for a moment overcome by the strain of the fearful ordeal, but he quickly rallied to find that Aurian Lancier had slipped from his arms and was lying white and motionless on the ground.

Thinking in his excitement that she was dead, he dropped on his knees beside her, and pressing a kiss swiftly upon her forehead, he cried :

“Oh, Aurian ! speak, my love, and say that you are not dead.”

To his unbounded joy she opened her eyes, and forgetful of all else save that she lived, he exclaimed :

“Heaven be praised ! I am happy.”

“What has happened?” she asked, starting up. “Oh, I remember ; but where is Maze?”

“Maze? Forgive me, Aurian, I had forgotten your horse in my joy that you were safe. Are you sure you are not harmed?”

“Quite sure, thanks to you. Please assist me to my feet, when we must recapture Maze. Oh, what a narrow escape!” she added with a shudder, as she glanced toward the wide gap so recently spanned by the wooden structure, which now lay like a dam across the mad stream a few rods below. “Esten, I shall never forget that you have saved my life, and you shall be suitably rewarded for your heroic act.”

The kindness of her tone emboldened him, and clasping her hand he said :

“I ask only one reward—yourself. Forgive me, dearest of women, if I speak what I have long wanted to say. Let me lay my heart at your feet as I did my life a moment ago. I love you——”

“Please stop, Mr. Berners; you are unfair. Save us both a humiliation neither of us care to meet. I am your friend always, as I believe you have been and are to me. Let this pass, while we see if we can find Maze.”

“No—no, Aurian—Miss Lancier! I have waited long—too long. As far back as memory takes me I have loved you, and the one dream in my life was the thought of a home shared with you. Stay! do not be offended——”

A deafening crash in the sky almost over their heads drowned his words, and both were for a moment blinded by the lightning’s flash.

CHAPTER III.

UNCLE FROST'S STORY—THE SECRET OF THE OLD GRANARY.

"THE storm is almost upon us!" cried Aurian. "Let us hasten on toward Uncle Frost's. We may overtake Maze on our way."

Esten Berners could not disobey, but as they climbed the hill, apparently unmindful of all else save the love devouring his very soul, he continued :

"It is as I dreamed! That peal of thunder was but the awakening gun of war. My ambition will be realized. Aurian, have I offended you?"

"No, Mr. Berners; but pray do not continue the subject. Let us seek shelter from the storm while we may."

"While we climb the hill I must talk, Aurian—Miss Lancier. I feel it is my only chance—that I have delayed the words that have burned on my tongue too long. You refuse me because I am beneath your station—because you are a Lancier and I am only the son of your father's overseer. I do not blame you; it is what I expected. But I have a better education than that proud brother of yours, whose sole ambition is to run down the frightened fox. I have higher motives, and I shall soon win a name that even a Lancier will be honored to bear. It is my destiny to command armies, and in the roll of honor my name will shine with rare luster when others are forgotten. I was born to be a soldier, Aurian, and when I come to you, as I am sure to, with my well-earned honors you will listen to my simple story of love and devotion, equaled only by that I bear my country."

His countenance shone with an unnatural light, and

there was a peculiar earnestness in his tone that startled his companion.

"What senseless prattle are you saying, Mr. Berners? I shall believe you have been suddenly bereft of your reason."

"Pardon me, Aurian, if my words are incomprehensible to you. I meant not to speak in riddles. I know that you are well versed enough in the affairs to realize that we are on the eve of a great war, coming as surely as yon storm is rising. I have seen its prophecy in the red dawn of day, and read again the crimson lines in the sunset's changing silver. Antietam's crystal current will flow in reddened hues, and her fair valleys become the battlegrounds of contending armies. It is there, a true son of the South, that I shall win my honors—a name even you will be proud to own. When America has won her second independence and—"

"There is Maze!" exclaimed Aurian, her joy at seeing her horse almost equaled by that of the relief she felt upon being able to change the topic of conversation. "Here, Maze, my runaway, did you think you had lost your mistress?"

The faithful horse trotted to her side, placing its head upon her shoulder with a low whinny of delight.

Another peal of thunder at that moment warned them of the continued advance of the storm.

"I believe I felt a drop of rain on my hand. We must hasten if we would reach shelter before the storm comes on."

"Let me assist you into the saddle, Miss Lancier; and then you can ride on to Uncle Frost's, while I will follow on foot. You forgive me, Aurian, if I have said anything that would have been better unsaid?" he asked, as she gained the seat. "The words would come; but I do not think I should have said them to-day if I had not heard that *he* had come back."

"He?" she asked, as she gathered up the reins. "Who do you mean by that indefinite term?"

"Then you do not know that Carroll Southard has returned?"

"No. But we must not delay longer. I hope you will reach Uncle Frost's in season to escape a drenching."

"Never mind me. But will you answer me one question before you go? Pardon me, but I would like to know if you have not been looking for his return."

"Looking for him? Why should I be? What nonsense has got into your head to-day?"

"But there was a time when you called him your lover. I—"

"Childish fancy. Why it has been five years since he went away and I have not heard from him—do not even know where he has been. Look out for the storm."

The next moment she was riding up the road at a smart canter, while he watched her retreating form regardless of the quickening patter of the rain on the ground and the ominous roll of the thunder overhead.

"She is proud," he murmured. "She thinks I am not worthy of her hand. Why should it have been my fate to occupy a position so far below the station which is rightfully mine. I am a better scholar than that dullard of a Robert, and yet he is fortunate enough to fall into a position above me. But Time evens all things, and it shall with me. The war is surely coming, and it will find me among the foremost of the defenders of old Maryland. I will win such honors as a Lancier dare not spurn."

As he finished this speech he hastened on in the course Aurian had taken.

Fortunately it was not over half a mile to the humble home of the free negro called Uncle Frost, and by the time Esten Berners had concluded his rather bitter tirade, she was reining up in front of the lonely abode, which stood upon a slight eminence of land in the heart of the primeval forest. In the rear the tall, dark, jagged mountain thrust its craggy head far above the surrounding landscape,

though towering, majestic pines on every hand seemed determined to outrival its dizzy height. The sound of rushing water told that the river ran just back of the small clearing made about the simple dwelling.

Though the door of the hut, for it was little better, was ajar, Aurian could hear no sound from within, and the thought came into her mind that she was too late. Springing lightly to the ground, she secured Maze where he would be the most sheltered from the oncoming tempest, and stepped swiftly across the well-worn threshold, just as a half-smothered sob reached her ears. At that moment the very floodgates of the heavens seemed to have been suddenly opened and the rain fell in torrents.

"Oh, am I too late, aunty?" she asked, when suddenly a dark body in the further corner of the dingy room assumed the ungainly proportions of a large, fleshy negro woman, whose dusky countenance quickly taking on a broad smile, exclaimed:

"Fore de Lord! ef hyur ain't dat bressed honey ob Missus Orry! Do yo' hyur dat, Frostus?"

"Praise de Lord!" came in a deep, sepulchral tone from the adjoining apartment. "I tole yo' she'd come, Debby. Come right in dis way, honey; de ol' man am 'bout fro de dark valley. I'se monstrous glad to see yo', Missus Orry. De ol' woman don' gib up yo' weren't comin', but I tol' her yo' hadn't forgot de ol' man. Come right in dis way, honey."

"Luddy me!" exclaimed the old woman, "yit am rainin'! Yas; go right in de odder room, honey. 'Pears to me yit am monstrous dark all ob a suddint."

It was so dark in the low-walled apartment that Miss Lancier had to grope her way toward the door of the inner room, but she knew the house well, and in a moment she stood by the couch of the sick man.

"Are you really so much worse, Uncle Frost?" she asked, as she took one of his thin hands in hers. "I ought to have come before, but I——"

"Dat's all right, honey. Ob course yo' can't be runnin' arter sich a poor ol' man as me. But I felt bounden to send fo' yo'. Missus Orry, I got sumthin' berry special to say to yo', an' yo' alone."

"'Pears like he don' heb ennyt'ing else on his min', " said Aunt Debby. "He talk 'bout dat all de time an' wonder yif Missus Orry don' git hyur in season. I s'pec' yit sumthin' monstrous 'portance, but he won't tell me nebber a word. I hopes yo' 'scuse an ol' man's foolishness, honey."

"I am sorry I didn't come sooner, but now I am here, Uncle Frost, you can say what you wish. You know I was always interested in what you had to say."

"I know's yit, honey; yo's alwus good to an ol' man. But don't de fire need pokin', Debby? An' 'pears like yo' need git er light, night hab come on so fas'. How de ribber do roar! Hab yo' gone, Debby?"

"Goin', Frostus. Don' yo' 'scite yo'self talkin' too much. 'Member I hab dat poultice to put on in jess fifteen minutes, an' yit's 'bout time fer yo' to take dat yarb drink."

"Don' fuss 'bout dat yarb drink, Debby. I'se took all I ebber s'all. De good Lord hes lef' me jess time 'nough to talk wiv Missus Orry. Be sure yo' don't 'sturb us, Debby; yo' know yit alwus flusters me to be 'sturbed."

Aunt Debby, without replying, shambled slowly out of the room, closing the door.

"Is de door shut hard, honey? An' air yo' sure dar's no one hyur in de dark but yo' n' me?"

"We are all alone, Uncle Frost. What can it be you have to say to me alone?"

"Sumthin' I nebber breathed aloud to er libbin' t'ing, not ebben Debby, or de birds, all de years, honey. But I hab had a hard time to keep it all to mysel' sometimes. Yit was a terrible thing—de terribles' thing I ebber heerd ob. Hark! how de ribber do roar! Seems like yit didn't want enny one to hear what I'm goin' to say."

"It's raining, Uncle Frost. We are having a fearful storm."

"Mebbe yit's all 'cause de good Lord don't want enny one but yo' to hear me. Come berry near, honey. Now listen, an' don' yo' miss a word. Ebery word is like a hot iron, but dey mus' be tol'. Yo' hearin' me, honey?"

"Yes, Uncle Frost; go on with your story."

"Yit's harder den I thought to tell, but somebody mus' know. I know no one else to tell. But let me begin. Yit all happened er long time ago. Bress me! yit wuz afore yo' were bo'n, honey. Den I wuz libbin' at Graymont wiv Massa Southard, an' nebber t'inkin' what wuz goin' to happen. Massa Southard wuz a good man; eberybuddy said dat. De ol' place looked scrumpus, 'cos yo' see he had plenty ob help—three hundred slaves, honey, an' ebery one ob dem willin' workers. How I hab longed fer dem good ol' days. But bress me how hard work 'tis fer me to git to what I want to tell. 'Pears like I could talk all eround it forebber. How de ribber do roar, honey!"

"Eberyting seemed at yits bes' at Graymont, an' ebery nigger was happy, w'en one night jess as dark massa sent for me, an' tol' me to saddle der big bay hoss fer him an' de sorrel fer myself', an' to be p'rared to go on a ride instunter. Ob course yit weren't fer me to do udder den he tol' me, an' s'pec's I got dat saddles on dem hosses in short meter. But none too quick fer massa, an' he jump inter de seat quicker den ebber I see him afore, an' he terrible spry man. I see he look awful glum, 'an w'en he rid off he went at sich a gallop dat I had hard work to keep in sight ob him.

"At fust I t'ought he wuz goin' to Sylvanny, but I knowed dat couldn't be so, fer I knowed a Southard an' a Laneier nebber spoke to each obber. I nebber know what make dat quarrel, but I know yit berry bitter. Wull, I found arter a while dat Massa Southard wuz goin' to de ol' Granary, es de ol' mill on de White Slash wuz called.

Yit am a powerful lonesome place, an' dar weren't a soul in sight w'en de massa pulled up his hoss under de ol' beech, which am standin' yet, an' a tossin' de reins to me, just said: 'Stay right hyur, Frost, till I come back.'

"Den he went inter de ol' ruined building, an' I wuz lef' dar erlone wiv dem hosses. Ob coarse de ol' man weren't afeerd, honey, but de time go so slow dat I got anxious waitin' dar. I got a long slender stick an' broke it up inter leetle bits; den I got another, an' I broke dat up; still de massa didn't come. I couldn't hear a sound, sabe de watah a-runnin' away in der ribber. Bress me! how dat ribber do roar, honey!"

"W'en I had waited jess es long es yit seemed I could wait, I did a berry wrong t'ing—sumthin' dat has given me a ha'nt ebber sence. I hope de Lord forgib me, but I dis'beyed de ol' massa, an' lef' my post. Yo' see I didn't know but sumthin' had happened to him, so I crept up to de ol' mill an' I peeked in. But I couldn't see a t'ing, nor hear a t'ing. Den I went eround to de udder side, an' climbin' up on some rotten lumber I looked in at de winder.

"De moon wuz shinin' on dis side, so eberyting seemed as plain as day. How de ribber do roar, honey! Jess let me git my bref afore I tell yo' whut I see by dat moonlight in dat ol' mill. I nebber fergit yit, an' seems to me I see yit now plainer den ebber.

"Massa Southard wuz standin' on de furder side wiv a pistol in his hand, an' a look as I had nebber seen him hab afore. Ober on one side wuz Massa Berners, yo' father's overseer, a' 'rectly opposite Massa Southard, but standin' wiv his back to me, so I couldn't see who he wuz, wuz another man wiv a pistol in his hand. Massa Berners wuz beginnin' to count, an' I knowed there wuz a duel on. How de ribber do roar, honey! 'Pears like I hain't got bref lef' to tell de res.' Right atween them two duelists, wiv her fair han's held up as if she wuz prayin', wuz a

woman ; an' dem men shoot, an' she fall dar dead ! Dar, I don' tol' yit at last. How de ribber do roar ! ”

Aurian, at a loss to know what to say, remained silent. She was half inclined to think that Uncle Frost's mind was wandering. But he had spoken terribly in earnest. In a moment he resumed :

“ I don' know but I hollered, but I tried not to. I couldn't stop to see mo'. I jess got back to dem hosses, an' stood dar stock still. I didn't hear enny mo' sound from de mill, but arter what seemed a long while massa came out, lookin' whiter den enny ghost. He looked scart, too. ‘ Did yo' git tired ob waitin,’ Frost?’ he asked. I nebber fergit dem words, an' dey wuz de las' he eber say to poor me. He got inter his saddle afore I could git to help him. Den he rode off home, wiv me a follerin' arter. W'en we got home, he flung de rein to me, an' he stride off inter th' house wivout a word. Dat wuz de las' time I ebber see him alive. How de ribber do roar, honey.

“ In de mornin' massa wuz found dead. Some said he had shot himsel'. Mebbe dey wuz right. I nebber say a word. Yit wuz an orful time at Graymont. Little Massa Carroll lef' wiv no one to look arter him, yit seemed as if de po' leetle t'ing mus' perish, till Debby an' I begun to look arter him. Den a mos' s'prisin' t'ing wuz found. Massa Southard had given ebery black on de ol' plantation his freedom, man, woman an' child. Dat's w'en Debby an' I got ours, but I didn't feel like shoutin' wiv t'others. Nex' it wuz found dat de whole plantation had been lef' to a stranger till leetle Carroll should be a man. Dat man come on wiv his swagger, an' everyt'ing goes to ruination as yo' see. Leetle Massa Carroll wuz sent on North to be looked arter by strangers. He wuz brought back fer a few years, but de ol' man nebber see him ag'in. Dar yo' hab de orful story, Missus Orry. Do yo' blame de ol' man fer wantin' to git yit off his mind afore he passed ober de dark ribber ? ”

"And you have never told this before, Uncle Frost?"

"Nebber, honey. I did t'ink I would tell yit to leetle Massa Carroll w'en he git big n'ough, but I nebber s'pec' to see him mo'."

"Did you know the woman who was shot, Uncle Frost?"

"She wuz Missus Berners."

"Oh, uncle! that cannot be."

"Suah, honey. How de ribber do roar! I see her plain."

"But the man who stood with his back toward you! Wasn't there anything about him you recognized?"

"Dat's what has puzzled me a heap sight, honey. He did look powerful like some one I had seen. But you see I wuz dat scart dat I spec' I didn't look berry clus."

"Could you describe his clothes? Wasn't there something about his garments that caught your attention?"

"Only one t'ing, Missus Orry. He had on a coat dat looked gray in de moonlight, an' yit had a big rent in de back atween de shoulders, so de striped linin' showed fro. De tear was shape like a harrer, an' I noticed dar wuz two white buttons on de skirt. Min' yo' I ain't sure 'bout de color, but I is sure 'bout de tear an' de buttons."

"And that is all you remember about him?"

"Yes; 'cept dat he wuz a tall man, taller den Massa Southard, an' he wuz nigh erbout six foot."

Before Aurian could say more the door was flung open and Aunt Debby burst into the room, exclaiming:

"Fore de Lord! we's gone fer suah. De ribber hab broke loose an' yit am runnin' all round us!"

CHAPTER IV.

AN ALARMING SITUATION.

IN HER anxiety over the startling story told by Uncle Frost, Aurian had been oblivious alike of the passage of time and the progress of the storm. Aunt Debby's terrified appearance now aroused her to the peril of her situation. The rain was pouring down in torrents, but its ceaseless roaring was drowned by a more fearful thunder, which fairly shook the foundation of the cabin.

"De ribber hab split 'bove hyur!" cried Aunt Debby, "an' it am runnin' on ebery side ob us."

A hasty examination of their surroundings showed Aurian that Debby was right. A narrow defile had extended parallel with the river on the opposite side of the house, and this was now filled with a stream rivaling the original in volume and awful rapidity of its current. Its foam-crested surface was strewn with the debris it had caught up from the earth. Trees were being uprooted by the furious flood and tossed hither and thither like toys for a moment, to be sucked out of sight the next in the whirlpool of waters. It was raining as fast and furious as ever, while the wind was blowing a gale.

"We s'all all be washed off an' drownt," moaned Aunt Debby. "Dis is drefful."

"Let us hope the storm will soon abate, aunty. As long as the water does not rise any higher I do not see that we are in any particular danger. I wonder how poor Maze is out in this drenching torrent."

Going to the door Aurian saw that the horse had got as close to the side of the house as possible, where he stood

ooking very abject. From this position she was able to look out upon the river proper, when she was startled to find that it was several feet higher than it had been at the time she had reached the cabin, less than hour before. There was something else about its appearance that she at first did not understand. It had seemed to change its position. Then in a moment she understood what this meant. *It was nearer the house!*

The soil in that vicinity being of a light, porous nature the water had eaten away huge slices of earth, until it had widened its channel to a considerable extent. Unknown to the occupants of the humble dwelling, this work of destruction had really been going on for some time.

"Why! it has reached the old pine!" exclaimed Aurian "I wonder if it will take that as it has all of the smaller trees in its way. You haven't seen anything of Mr. Berners, aunty?"

"Habn't see a soul, honey, but yo' own bressed self. Do yo' s'pose we sa'll all be washed away, Missus Orry?"

"Oh, no; I think not. At any rate we must keep up good courage. Isn't Uncle Frost calling to you?"

Seeing there was no possible way of escape, Aurian continued to watch the downpouring rain and the work of the river which kept up its rayenous attacks on the little summit of land like some hungry monster devouring its prey. The look of anxiety deepened on her countenance as she saw the rapidity with which the water was eating away the bank.

"It is undermining the old pine fast. How I wish the rain would stop. Where can Mr. Berners have gone? I suppose he was somewhat offended at the way I left him. But if I had stopped another moment I should not have got here in season to have escaped the torrent."

For two long, tedious hours Aurian watched the storm and the river, joined in her lonely vigil ever and anon by the half frantic Aunt Debby.

“‘Pears like Frostus is brighter; but fore de good Lord what air we goin’ to do, Missus Orry? De ribber come nearer an’ nearer berry fast, don’t yit? An’ it is gettin’ berry dark—de darkest day I eber see.’”

“Night is coming on now, aunty. It is going to be very dark, too.”

Aunt Debby wrung her hands.

“What s’all we do, honey? Do yo’ t’ink de ribber will las’ till mornin’?”

“You mean, I suppose, will it reach us before morning. I am afraid it will. Look! there goes a huge slice from the upper end of our little island. Another piece like that and it will be down to that row of stumps where Uncle Frost had his melon patch. Is it raining as hard as it was?”

“I can’t tell, honey; ‘deed I can’t, dese ol’e eyes air so full ob tears. To t’ink our ol’ home should go in dis way an’ on de berry night—dar’s Frostus a hollerin’ to me. He seem jess like a chile now fo’ all de world.”

“I wonder if they are missing me at home?” thought Aurian. “And that S’posen! Did he follow me? Strange I should have forgotten him so fully. But they could not get here if they knew I was here. No one could cross either of those streams. All I can do is to watch and wait and hope.”

Darkness came on rapidly, and before long it was too dark to see the rushing water, though its deep, sullen roaring alarmed them more than it had by day. Now that the awful sight was shut out from their eyes, they noticed the incessant thunder of the flood more, each added outbreak giving them fresh cause for alarm.

“‘Pears like de house do move!’” said Aunt Debby at last, in a low, awed tone. “Is dat you speakin’, Frostus?”

“Wharfo’ don’ yo’ strike a light, Debby?”

“‘Cos de las’ bit ob dat candle am cl’an burned up.”

“Wharfo’ don’ yo’ build a fire, Debby?”

"Yes, aunty; build up a good, bright fire; they might see it over at Sylvania. You know it is in sight on fair days. I will help you build the fire, Aunt Debby."

"Luddy sakes, honey, 'twon' take me long to build all de fire we can wiv whut leetle wood I hab. Yo' see Frostus hab been ailin' so long dat de pile he had got in is cl'an gone."

"If you had only said so, aunty, some one should have come up from Sylvania to cut some for you. But we will look around and we may be able to find some."

It came near being a fruitless search in the darkness, Debby finally getting hold of a handful of twigs she had brought in that afternoon.

"I s'pec' dar am coals 'nough from de fire I had to make dat porridge. Yo' see I 'tended to go out fo' mo' wood, but de storm an' my fluster ober Frostus cl'an driv it out ob my wooly head. Do yo' git yit started, honey."

Aurian had succeeded in fanning into life the few remaining coals in the stone fireplace, and in a moment the solitary scene was enlivened by the cheery rays of the fire.

"How much better that is," said Aurian. "Now, we can find more wood by looking around. We must keep the fire burning. Hark! I thought I heard some one step. But it is only poor Maze; he is getting uneasy, and no wonder. I don't believe it is raining as hard as it was. I am going to look out of the door."

Upon opening the door a gust of wind swept into the house, and the rain beat into her face. If it was not raining as fast as before dark, she realized that the roar of the river sounded nearer and louder. Maze gave a snort and moved heavily to and fro.

"Poor Maze you have got no shelter—mercy! what has happened. Come here quick, aunty! Maze has fallen down. No! he is on his feet again. But there is something wrong. What shall we do?"

The horse soon became more quiet, though it was noticed that he had changed his position.

After this nothing broke the terrible monotony of the warring elements until Aurian judged it must be near midnight. She was sure the storm was abating now, though there was no such encouraging change with the river. Everything combustible that could be found had been put upon the fire, which was dying away, leaving them in blinding gloom. Uncle Frost was groaning and moaning in anguish, while Debby could do little more than wring her hands and bemoan their sad fate. A stouter heart than Aurian's must have failed.

"We must not let the fire go out. Perhaps I can find something that will burn outside. I am going to look anyway, aunty."

"I wouldn't do yit, honey; 'deed I wouldn't. Yo'll lose yo'sel' in de darkness an' git washed 'way."

But Aurian was already leaving the house, though she had not taken a second step before she was startled by a wild snort from Maze, and she heard the horse making a more frantic struggle than ever.

"What is the trouble, poor fellow? Mercy! help, Aunty Debby, the ground is all falling away!" Though it was too dark for her to see her horse she knew the animal was struggling to free itself from the watery pit which had opened all about the doomed place. "The river is almost upon aunty. The house must go in a—oh, dear! what is—" Her words were cut short by a terrific crash, swiftly following the sound of breaking wood, and the ground beneath her feet shook and trembled as if falling away! The awful disturbance brought a snort of fierce alarm from her horse, which broke from its tether and nearly hurled her to the earth in its wild plunge forward. With a cry of terror she retreated to the door.

"Fo' de lord! is de yearth gone?" gasped Aunt Debby, checking for a moment her wild lamentations.

"It was the old pine, aunty. Luckily it fell the other way or we should have been crushed to death be——"

"We s'all go nex', honey. Do yo' hear dat, Frostus? De ol' pine hab gone suah."

The fire had burned so low that Aurian could barely discern the burly figure of her companion. From the inner apartment Uncle Frost's moans and groans made more wild and weird the terrible situation. Miss Lancier did not lack for courage, but at that moment if she had not before she felt that they were hopelessly lost.

"We must keep a fire, aunty, at all hazards. If there is nothing else to be burned, we must tear down a portion of the house. This darkness is worse than everything else, for it makes it impossible for us to know what is taking place around us."

"Dar is no hope fo' us, honey, now de ol' pine is gone. Dat ol' tree dat's sheltered me an' po' Frostus from de suns an'de storms so many years."

Seeing that her overwrought companion was in no condition to assist her, Aurian lost no further time in seeking material to replenish the fire in a new direction of search. In this she was more fortunate than she had anticipated, and from the half ruined walls of a sort of lean-to built at the back of the main structure she obtained a sufficient number of boards to make a roaring fire, whose cheerful blaze scattered the shadows to the darker corners. Aunt Debby was still by the couch of poor old Uncle Frost, whose frail hold upon life was weakening fast. Through the open door the fire shone out upon the scene in front of the dwelling, showing plainly the drenched form of Maze. It may have been the sight of the fire which caused the intelligent creature to suddenly lift its head and give a whinny of delight. That single, untranslatable utterance gave Aurian a thrill of pleasure.

"Noble fellow! You are not discouraged. Let me get another armful of wood and I will hug you for that!"

Throwing on the fire the remnant of the boards left, she started to get a new supply. Less fortunate in finding material for fuel than at first, she had finally succeeded in collecting as much as she could carry, and she was in the act of gathering it up, when she was startled by a loud scream from Aunt Debby, followed by the alarming words :

“ ‘Fore de Lord de house is all on fire! Missus Orry! come hyur quick, fo’ we’s gone dis time suah !”

CHAPTER V.

STANDING ON A VOLCANO.

LETTING the wood fall from her hold, Aurian hurried back to the kitchen as fast as possible, finding the room lit to more than midday brilliancy by the fire, which had caught upon the wall and was spreading rapidly right and left. She saw this at a glance, but the next moment her gaze was turned toward the door by the sound of footsteps and the sudden appearance of a man's figure upon the scene.

It was Esten Berners, drenched by the storm but looking hopeful. At sight of him Aurian uttered a low cry of joy, exclaiming :

"I never was so glad to see any one in my life, Esten ! We are in a sorry plight." She did not ask him how he had reached the place ; in fact, she did not have the time before he was fighting the flames.

When he had succeeded in subduing the fire at the cost of some severe burns, he said :

"I knew you were in fearful danger if not lost, and I came as soon as I could. The rain came on so quickly after you left me this afternoon that I was forced to seek the shelter of a shelf of rock overhanging the defile just back from the road. But I was soon driven from my retreat by the flood that suddenly came rushing down the valley. I was not long in learning that Wind River was running wild, and all at once the peril of your situation flashed upon my mind. But when I got in this vicinity I found it impossible for any one to cross the river, and after

trying in vain to find a place where I could reach this bank, I was obliged to return to a place nearly opposite here, where I have remained ever since. I shouted to you until I was hoarse, in the vain hope you might hear me. I knew I could not summon aid to get here before morning, and that I feared would be too late. It has proved fortunate that I kept at my post, for the falling of that big pine has made a bridge over the stream, and by that means I have reached you. You have not suffered any harm, Aurian?"

Before she could reply a newcomer appeared upon the scene. Like Esten Berners he was drenched by the storm, and his coat hung in tatters, while his head was uncovered. He looked about the age of the overseer's son, but his hair and mustache were of a darker hue than the other's; and though lacking fully an inch of the height of the first, he had a larger frame and must have been several pounds the heavier of the two. If Esten Berners had ever met him before, he did not signify it, and the embarrassing silence was broken by the stranger, saying as he advanced with outstretched hand:

"I expect this is Miss Aurian Lancier, though it hardly seems possible my little playmate has grown into womanhood so soon. Have you forgotten Carroll Southard?"

Unable to comprehend the speaker's words, Aurian hesitated in her reply; but Aunt Debby allowed no such restraint to hold her back, and throwing up her fat arms she fell upon his shoulders, exclaiming between her outbursts of joy:

"Oh, Massa Cal! Massa Cal, do dese ol' eyes make fools ob dis po' ol' woman or am dis yo' in flesh an' blood?"

"It is I, Aunt Debby, most assuredly; and I am heartily glad to see you. How is Uncle Frost?"

"Oh, Frostus! Frostus!" she cried, regardless of the question, "he hab come suah!"

"Who dat?" called out Uncle Frost.

"Massa Cal, suah, Frostus; but growed to such a big, monstrous man yo' neber——"

"Massa Cal!" exclaimed the sufferer, suddenly rallying and beginning to leave his couch. "I'se comin' right out dar! De berry sight ob him am wuff a hundred y'ars ob libin'!"

"No!" screamed Aunty Debby, seizing the newcomer with a firmer hold and actually pulling him into the adjoining room. "Here he come! Hain't he a lubly boy?"

While this strange and demonstrative meeting was in process, Esten Berners was urging Aurian to leave the place at once.

"Let us cross over the treeway while we may. It cannot remain there a long time. The storm has cleared away, and if we go at once we can do it with little difficulty."

But Aurian could not think of deserting Aunt Debby and Uncle Frost.

"We must save them. What a handsome man Carroll Southard has become!" she added, as she watched the greeting between him and the overjoyed negroes. Esten Berners shrugged his shoulders without replying. "I wonder how he happened here at this time," added Aurian.

If pleased to meet his old friends, Carroll Southard was not forgetful of their situation, and as soon as he could free himself from them he said:

"Every moment is of priceless value to us if we would save our lives. Come, aunt, you must go with us across the river, and as soon as we have seen you and Miss Lancer over in safety we will return for Uncle Frost." But Aunt Debby would not think of leaving her husband until her new-found friend had promised to remain with him during the interval of waiting.

"I goes willingly wiv Massa Esten now, fo' I knows Frostus 'll be safer wid yo' den eberybuddy else. Come, honey, we mus' go 'way frum de ol' place though it am like breakin' de heart."

Esten Berners was already leaving the building, and

Aurian followed him, while Aunt Debby hobbled along behind.

"Oh, Maze!" exclaimed Aurian, "must we leave him, Mr. Berners?"

"I see no other alternative. But hasten, Miss Lancier; I fear we have lost too much time. The old tree is rolling fearfully. It will soon be swept away" Here, take my hand; let me assist you over this slough. If you will wait until I have guided Miss Lancier to the edge of the water, I will come back for you."

"Luddy! I reckons I don' need none ob yo' 'sistance, Massa Esten. I ain't none ob yo' skeered wenches dat—oh! luddy sakes! I'm drownt all ober! Oh, Massa Esten, sabe de po' ol' brack woman—splurge—erchew—blub!"

Aunt Debby had passed too near to the edge of the treacherous strip of land and the ground had broken away beneath her weight, sending her upon her hands and knees in two or three feet of water, where she was floundering about in great terror, all the while giving utterance to the most unheard-of sounds. Not without considerable difficulty did Esten Berners succeed in rescuing her, when he led her to the spot where Aurian was awaiting them at the foot of the fallen pine.

So swiftly had the storm cleared away that only light, fleecy clouds were then scudding across the sky, showing now in its September mellowness nothing of the equinoctial fury so recently possessing it. In the west a fragment of the old moon threw bars of silvery light over the openings in the forest landscape. Every part of the little knob of land now forming the island site of the doomed home was seen with a vividness that brought a shudder to Aurian. She could see that the water had eaten nearer to the house than she dared to think, and that unless the river subsided soon the dwelling must go with the rest. The dismal night alarm of an owl in the distance fell with an unusual melody upon her ears. It was the first sound of life falling on the lonely scene.

"Let me assist you out upon the log," said Esten Berners. "Hold fast to whatever you can get your hands upon. The old tree is beginning to roll fearfully. We must get across as soon as we can, for it is not going to remain long where it is. I will come back after you, aunty, as soon as I have seen Miss Aurian safely over."

The log was wet and slippery, and quivering and rolling to and fro as it was, Aurian felt several times that she must be precipitated into the surging tide below. But fortunately the pine held to its position until the rescuer had succeeded in getting clumsy Aunt Debby to the further bank of the stream, though she narrowly escaped falling into the torrent half a dozen times.

"You will find a more sheltered place just below here by a big bowlder," said Esten Berners, "where you must make yourself as comfortable as possible until I can help Southard bring Uncle Frost to this side."

"But he mus' hab some comfort'bles—somethin' to 'keep him from de wet groun' or he'll ketch his def ob col'."

"We will bring something of that kind, aunt; we shall need to wrap him up in some way; so have no concern."

Without stopping for a reply he started back over the river, finding that the pine was being fast loosened from its frail support. "How we are going to bring the old man across is more than I can see!" he exclaimed, as he found great difficulty in maintaining a hold for himself. But he was not long in recrossing, when he hastened to the door of the house. There he was met by the impatient Maze, who seemed to be watching the scene with almost human intelligence, his low whinny no doubt asking when his turn would come. Gently pushing the creature to one side, Berners was stepping across the threshold, when his attention was arrested by the voices of the men within.

"You are sure it was Daniel Berners' wife, Frost?" Carroll Southard was asking.

"Luddy sakes, Massa Cal, dar could be no mistake. Yo'

see de light fell jess right fo' me to see her an' yo' fadder. I'se——”

“This must be some horrible nightmare of your mind, Uncle Frost. But go over that part of your story again; let me see if you can tell it twice alike.” Then, with the pale-faced listener bending over him, and unknown to them Esten Berners drinking in every fateful word, while his frame shook and deep lines entered his fair countenance, the dying negro retold his tragic story, never deviating from the words he had given Aurian Lancier, adding:

“I see yit all now jess as plain as I did dat orful night—de w'ite face ob yo' fadder, de good massa ob Graymont, den whom no better man eber libed, de look ob fright on Missus Berners' purty face, an' Massa Berners standin' by lookin' like de berry debil.”

“But the other man who fired—he who was there with father—did you fail to recognize him?”

“I did suah, Massa Cal, 'cept dat gray coat an' dat harrer-shaped tear an' dem w'ite buttons.”

“Have you told this to any one else, Uncle Frost?”

“Not a libbin' pusson, 'cept Missus Orry. I had to tell yit to some one, Massa Cal. I hopes I hain't don' nuffin wrong, 'deed I does. I nebbe s'pec' to put dese ol' eyes on yo' bressed sel' else I nebber open my mouth to a soul.”

At this point Uncle Frost's overworked strength gave away and he fell back upon his pillow, gasping for breath. Carroll Southard was startled by the sound of footsteps, and looking around he saw Esten Berners standing by his side. The look upon the other's face, his attitude, every action showed that he had overheard every word that had been spoken, and that he was writhing under the sting of what had been said. Involuntarily he started back:

“How you startled me, Mr. Berners. Have you succeeded in getting Miss Lancier and Aunt Debby safely across the torrent?”

“What was that the old man was telling you? What did he mean?” demanded Berners sternly.

"You evidently know as well as I, for you seem to have heard it all. I do not deem it more than an idle fancy of a dying man's brain. I—"

"Beware!" came from between the other's clenched teeth. "At last the fate of my dear mother is known to me, and her blood is on your name, Carroll Southard."

"Hold on, my dear Mr. Berners," said young Southard, trying to speak calmly. "Do not judge hastily. His mind wanders; it was doubtless nothing more than an idle vagary of his disordered intel—" Uncle Frost had become so frantic in his delirium that the speaker turned to lay his hand on the dying man.

"De ol' Granary!" he cried. "Dey air all dar—all four! De shot—I hear yit! How w'ite massa look! Yit am orful, an' he nebber speak to po' ol'—how de ribber do roar, honey!" and with this final declaration the poor, worn-out body dropped back upon its humble couch and lay perfectly still. Carroll Southard lifted one of the limp hands, to let it fall beside the unconscious form, saying in a low tone:

"He is dead."

Esten Berners' features softened at the sight he had witnessed, and it was several moments before he spoke or moved, and then there was a huskiness in his voice, and he put his hand to his brow as he asked:

"Are you armed, Carroll Southard?"

It was too dark for the twain to see each other with any distinctness, but appearances mattered little to men in their state of mind. It was natural that Carroll Southard should be the calmer of the two. His tone showed no tremor, as he replied:

"No, Mr. Berners; I have no weapon with me. Even had I at the outset it would have been useless after my drenching from the storm. But before we think of ourselves, let us bear the body of poor old Uncle Frost away from this place. Let us do it for Aunt Debby's sake."

"When that is done you will afford me satisfaction?"

"All in the world, Mr. Berners. If my life would drive the shadow from my name I would gladly lay it at your feet. But we are losing valuable time; every moment is precious to us if we would—" he paused in the midst of his speech as a dull boom came from the direction of the river.

"I believe the old tree has been washed away," said Esten Berners. "Wait a moment and I will see if it is so." He was absent but a few minutes, and when he came back he announced the worst. "The pine has been whipped around heels foremost and is now on its way to the Antietam. We are prisoners on this bit of land with no chance of getting off."

"But what will become of Miss Lancier and Aunt Debby?"

"They are comparatively safe, while it will now soon be daylight. I wish I could say as much for us."

"Perhaps the river will abate now it has stopped raining."

"It shows no signs of it as yet. This whole knoll seems to rest on a bed of quicksand, and it won't take the water much longer to wash it completely away."

To say nothing of their danger it was an unpleasant situation for them. Carroll Southard knew that the fine, sensitive nature of his companion was writhing under the agony of the discovery so recently revealed to him. His father's conduct on that fateful night had always been a dark mystery to himself, while the cloud was scarcely lighter now. Esten Berners said nothing, as he began to pace slowly back and forth in the darkness. The horse slowly made the circuit of the little island.

CHAPTER VI.

AURIAN DECIDES TO VISIT THE OLD GRANARY.

AURIAN and Aunt Debby were too anxious over the fate of their friends to think of seeking shelter for themselves at the boulder mentioned by Mr. Berners. Though the ground was damp after the rain, the storm had cleared away with an atmosphere that brought a genial warmth. Thus, oblivious of everything else, they remained on the river bank awaiting the coming of the others. As minute after minute passed without bringing any indications of them, they grew anxious. To add to their alarm the tree stretching across the watery chasm was swaying each moment with increasing violence. The little hold it still had upon the land was being fast eaten away. What if it should be torn off and swept away before the men could have time to cross over?

Aunt Debby began to shout lustily, but her voice was swallowed up by the incessant roar of the stormy waters. Then the pine was seen to suddenly pitch headlong into the stream, its huge length tossed like a cockle shell on the seething surface of the flood. A moment later it was borne out of sight! Terrified Aunt Debby's cries grew wilder than ever, and she emphasized them with wild movements of her arms, which sawed the air like flails.

"Oh, Frostus! he will be los'! What s'all we do, Missus Orry? Dis is terribler an' terribler."

"We are powerless to help them, aunty. All we can do is to watch and wait. Let us hope the water will not reach the house after all."

The solemn note of the sentinel owl heard again above

the thunder of the rushing water inspired their hearts with new hope, while farther away, on the side of the mountain, the bark of a fox told them that at least the animal world was on the alert. But these sounds and the dreary monotone of the river were all that relieved their lonely vigil, until a faint grayish streak appeared on the distant horizon.

"Day is breaking!" said Aurian joyously. "It will soon be light, and that is some encouragement. Hark! I thought I heard some one shouting. Let us join our voices and we may be heard." To their great joy their efforts were rewarded by the sound of a voice from over the stream.

"It is Esten, I am quite sure. The river must be falling away.

"The worst is over. Lend your voice to mine again, aunty."

In the midst of their repeated calls they were alarmed by the sound of footsteps behind them; but their fears turned to unbounded happiness when they saw Robert Lancier approaching, accompanied by half a dozen slaves from the plantation.

"Why, Aurian Lancier!" he cried, stopping abruptly at sight of her. "How in the world came you here, and what has happened? We have been searching for you ever since midnight. That rascally S'posen Jones said you had been drowned in Wind River."

Aurian's explanation was rather incoherent, but she managed to make him understand what had occurred, and the peril of those still at the home of Uncle Frost.

"You must get home as soon as possible, and Aunt Deb had better go with you. A part of the negroes shall accompany you, while the rest remain to help me rescue Uncle Frost and Mr. Berners. You will have to go to Sylvania by the south road, on account of the loss of the bridge over Wind River."

"Carroll Southard is with Esten, Robert."

"What has brought Carroll Southard into these parts again?" asked young Lancier, without stopping for her to say what she wished. "The dog had better—Look there, Sambo! what is that in the river below you? It looks—"

"Why, it is Maze!" cried Aurian excitedly. "He is trying to swim across. Can't something be done to help him? See! he is being carried down the stream."

Nothing could be done to lend assistance to the noble steed in its efforts to stem the current, and for a time it looked as if the horse must fail in its desperate attempt. But fortunately the stream had become cleared of the mass of driftwood that had at first choked it, and finally to Aurian's great joy Maze reached the bank. She ran down to the spot where the creature succeeded in effecting a landing, and unmindful of its wet form threw her arms about its neck.

"Noble Maze! you couldn't stay there any longer."

Robert at that moment called to her, telling her that Esten and his companion could be seen quite plainly. Then the parties managed to exchange greetings, when it was learned that Uncle Frost's life had gone out with the storm. This was the signal for an outburst of weeping from Aunt Debby, and she declared she would cross the river at all hazards, to see "Frostus" once more. Aurian, feeling confident that there was little if any further danger to the couple on the island, turned her attention toward getting Aunt Debby to go to Sylvania with her.

The negroes were mounted, so Robert ordered one of them to turn his horse over to Debby, and Aurian riding Maze the little party started homeward.

It was a sorry-looking little cavalcade that rode leisurely into the grounds at Sylvan Manor three hours later, but even Aunt Debby's countenance lightened at the sight of the old homestead.

Major Lancier had returned an hour before, and he was

issuing orders right and left for a search to be made for his missing daughter. At sight of her now, he hurried down from the veranda to greet her.

"Where have you been? And what won't you do next? Here we have been scouring the country in every direction, and nobody knowing where you were."

"Do give me an opportunity to answer, father. I left word here where I was going. Uncle Frost sent for me to come and see him as soon as possible, and I barely got there before the storm. We had a fearful adventure there, but I will tell you all about it as soon as I can replace these bedraggled garments with some more comfortable. Don't you think, father, poor Frost is gone?"

Major Lancier made some reply to this which Aurian did not catch, as she turned Maze over to the care of one of the servants and hastened into the manor, where she found everybody in an anxious state of mind.

"We all thought from the reports that you had been killed. Such a storm as we have had, too. Robert started to search for you before midnight, and we have not seen him since. Perhaps the poor boy has been killed, too. Where have you been?"

"Do give me time to remove these wet clothes, Mrs. Ralston, and see that Aunt Debby is cared for. Poor old Uncle Frost is no more. Who are those gentlemen with father?"

"Some men who came home with him, dear. I do not even know their names, and all they seem to have to say is about war. Oh, dear me! I don't know what we are coming to."

Aurian sought her apartment without further delay, and it was fully an hour later when she reappeared showing little indication of her recent adventure. Robert had not yet returned, and seeing that her father was still occupied with his guests, she returned to the seclusion of her room, leaving word with the housekeeper to be called as soon as

Robert got home. Though wondering who the men could be who thus commanded her father's attention at that time, she was really glad for the respite thus allowed her before she should be called upon for the account of her visit to the home of the free negro. Uncle Frost's strange story occupied her mind almost to the exclusion of everything else. Was there any real foundation for such a mysterious affair? or was it merely the hallucination of a disordered mind? She had been told of the untimely end of Calvin Southard—how he had been found dead in his room one morning, when he had retired, as far as was known, as well as usual the evening before. Some professed the belief that he had been murdered; others that he had been the victim of an accidental shot; and still more that he had killed himself. Nothing was found among his papers to clear up the mystery, but something fully as startling was found. That was the freedom paper for every slave he had possessed. The property was placed in trust for his only child, when the latter should have become a man. But he who came into temporary possession of Graymont so sadly abused his trust that the old homestead soon went to ruin. Young Carroll was sent North to be educated or to be gotten out of the way. A few years later the occupant of the plantation suddenly disappeared and the old place was entirely deserted. Now Carroll Southard, a strong, noble-looking man, had unexpectedly returned, though for what purpose she was unable to decide.

"He seems the personification of honesty," she said, half aloud. "What can have been the cause of the trouble between the Lanciers and the Southards? I broached the subject to father once, but he gave me such a reply and such a look that I have never dared to mention it since. I wonder what he will think of Uncle Frost's—"

A smart rap at the door suddenly arrested her speech, and the soft voice of Mrs. Ralston said :

"If you please, Miss Aurian, Robert has returned, and your father wants to see you in the library."

"Tell him I will be right down." To herself she added: "I wonder why he wants to see me there. I had rather meet him anywhere else."

On her way to answer his summons, however, she met Robert, who inquired anxiously in regard to her journey home, and declared that he had effected the rescue of Berners and Southard from their unpleasant situation.

"The river is subsiding nearly as fast as it came up. But how in the world did that Southard come there? Berners is as glum about him as an owl. Perhaps you can enlighten me."

As we know, Aurian could throw no information upon the matter.

"But father is waiting for me and I must go to him."

"Well, good-by, sis; I am off for Annapolis."

"Isn't this sudden, Robert?"

"Rather. You see they are holding a sort of a convention there to see what Maryland shall do in event the North press their abolition views too far. I don't think you will find father with any very long stories, for he is going, too.

"We have got to get out every man, or old Maryland will be captured by the enemy."

Without stopping to say more than "good-by," Aurian hastened to the library, where she found her parent impatiently awaiting her appearance.

"You have been a long time coming, my daughter; but it may have seemed longer to me because of my haste to get away. I must return to Annapolis immediately. I hope you are none the worse for your adventure and that you will not get into another predicament like your last while I am away this time."

"I hope not, father. But what is it that calls you back to Annapolis so soon? You are away from home nearly all of the time lately."

"Affairs of grave character demand my attention, my daughter I fear there are troublesome times coming."

There will be unless old Maryland is true to her colors. But I cannot stop to talk with you now. Help Mrs. Ralston manage matters at Sylvania until I get home, and make such arrangements for Aunt Debby as you think best. You know she can stay here if she wishes to do so. I have something of great importance I wish to say to you when I get back, but for the present good-by."

Kissing her with uncommon nervousness, he hurried out of the manor to join the men who were waiting for him at the gate. Watching him until he had ridden out of sight, and knowing that Robert had already departed, she sought the housekeeper to confer with her in regard to the funeral of Uncle Frost.

Whether about her duties at the manor or seeking recreation from her book under her favorite catalpa, Aurian could not drive from her mind the story told her by Uncle Frost, and finally she laid down the volume, saying:

"I have a curiosity to see the old Granary. It is singular I have never visited the old place oftener, though there has been nothing to call me that way until now. Why, it has been five years since I was one of a party of five who made a trip to the lonely ruins, and I hardly think I could find the spot now. I will ride down there to-morrow afternoon if nothing happens to prevent my leaving the manor."

Once Aurian had decided to do anything she seldom failed to carry out her intentions; accordingly about mid-afternoon the following day she summoned the redoubtable S'posen, and told him to saddle Maze and to get in readiness himself to accompany her on a drive.

"Of course you know the best way to the old Granary, S'posen," she said, as she sprang lightly into the saddle. "I am going to ride down there just to see the old place once more."

"Do whut, missus?" asked her sable attendant, beginning to roll his eyes and move uneasily.

"I want you to guide me to the old Granary; the Mill on the Lash, as it is sometimes called."

"Dunno' wharfo' yo' speak, Missus Orry. Neber dar, suah."

"Why, S'posen Jones! you must know well enough where I mean. Of course you know, so mount Gyp and lead the way."

"S'cuse me, missus, I s'pects I do know whar yo' mean; but I got berry bad pain. I—oh—oh—how dat do hu't!"

"What in the world has come over you?" cried Aurian, surprised if not alarmed at this sudden outburst. "What is the matter?"

The negro continued to groan with increasing vehemence, while he doubled himself up like a jackknife, as he dropped upon the lawn, moaning at last between his gasps and sobs:

"I ain't fit to go, 'deed I ain't, missus. I'se drefful sorry, but yo'll hab to git Tom Patch to go, oh—oh—o—o—oh!"

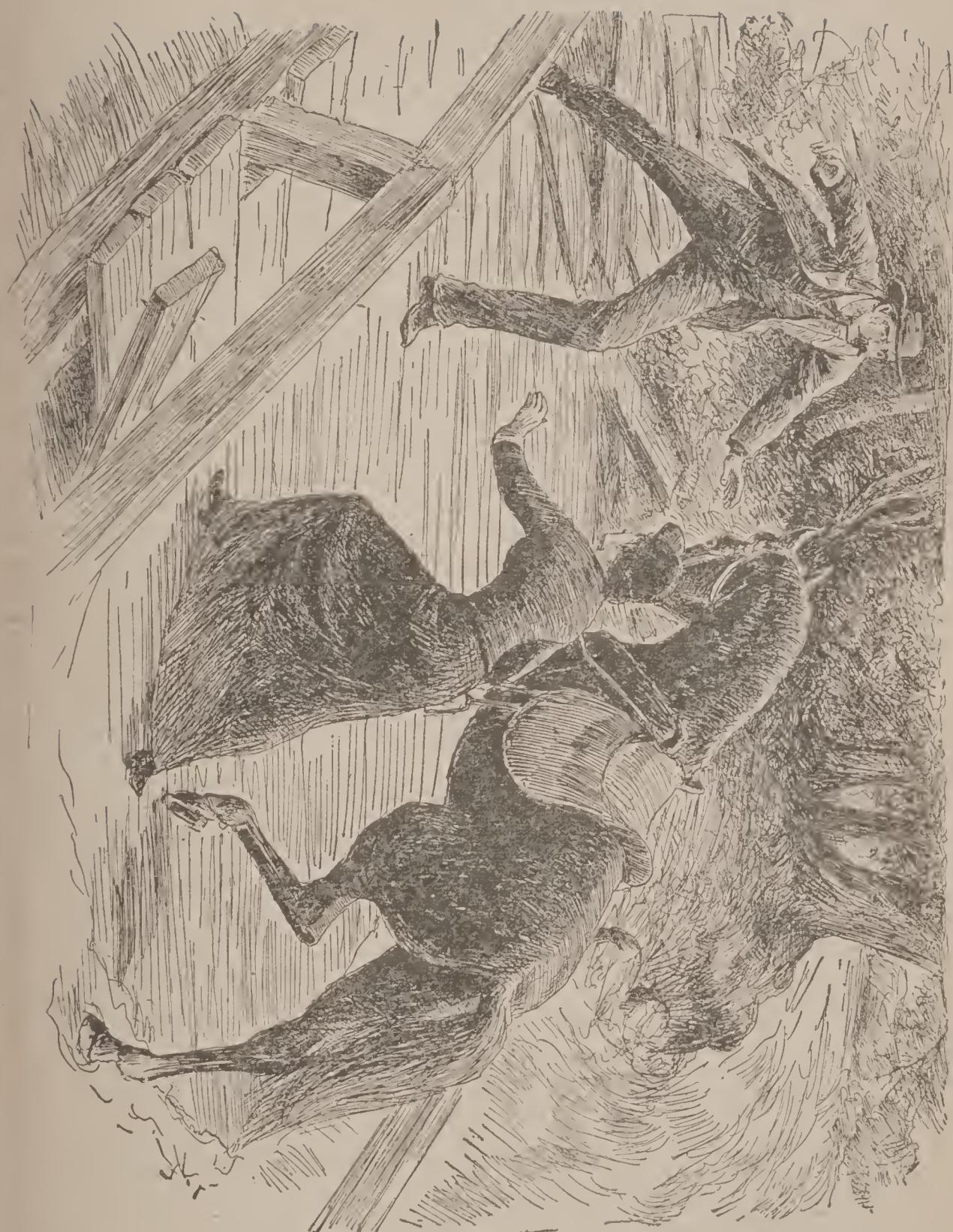
If somewht alarmed at first, by this time Aurian believed that she understood the situation, so she said:

"Very well, S'posen; I won't say anything more about the old Granary now, but you and I will ride down to Breck's Corner at least, as the day is too pleasant to remain indoors."

In an instant S'posen's cramped figure straightened and he was quickly on his feet with a broad grin on his dusky features as he ducked his wcolly head, saying:

"Sartin, missus; we's off like de win'."

Refraining to allude to the negro's sudden recovery then, Aurian dashed down the driveway and away on the road to Sharpsburg at a canter which puzzled her attendant to equal. The recent rain had given a refreshing coolness to the atmosphere that was most delightful, while every slight irritation of the sandy highway was not likely to call upon the offender a stifling cloud of dust.



The swaying of the bridge made it dangerous.—See page 17.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MYSTERY OF THE OLD MILL ON THE LASH.

AS SHE rode past the home of the Berners, Aurian saw Esten coming toward the road. At sight of her he doffed his hat, and half raised his hand, as if he would signal for her to stop. But not caring to be delayed in her trip, feeling she had scanty time to accomplish its purpose, she returned his greeting without checking her speed. Glancing back after she had gone some distance, she was slightly vexed to find that he was still watching her.

Knowing that the stream called The Lash crossed the main road about a mile below the Sentinel's Gateway, she said nothing to her attendant in regard to her destination, until she suddenly reined up Maze in a narrow valley hemmed in on three sides by rugged hills. The loneliness of this spot was enlivened by the merry rippling of rushing water darting around sharp angles of rock, into dark nooks overhung with bushy fringes, or anon down exposed rapids reflecting the silver of sunlight, onward like some fugitive doomed to flee forever, with a sigh on its lips and a song in its heart. The Lash was noted for its intricate turns and twists, its curves and zigzags, hence its name.

"The way to the old mill must be near to the place," said Aurian, "but I have forgotten just where it leaves the road, the bushes have made such advances. Can it be that grass-grown pathway just ahead, S'posen?"

The negro's teeth began to chatter, and he shook visibly in his seat. "I feel dat pain comin', missus. I drefful sorry, Missus Orry, but I sp'ecs' I'se goin' to be a drefful sick nigger—"

"You will be a sick nigger, S'posen Jones!" cried his mistress, beginning to lose her patience, "if you don't sit up in your saddle and answer my question. I will cure your 'pain' quicker than I did before, but in a different way. Show me the road that leads to the old Granary without further loss of time."

S'posen Jones knew that he had tried his mistress as far as it would do, and he endeavored to throw off the evidence of his terror by pretending to look for the desired pathway, as the road once leading to the old mill had become invisible through long disuse. He knew the narrow opening winding away through the growth marked the course for them to follow, and he also knew that a hundred rods beyond, on the other side of the river, was another pathway almost identical with this. Why couldn't he pretend that he believed the other was the right one, and thus lead his mistress on a mistaken course until it was too late to find the old ruined mill? He was trying to get a practical plan of this kind through his dull intellect, when Aurian exclaimed:

"Why is it, S'posen, you are so loath to go to the old mill? Do you think there is any one about the old place to harm you?"

"Yit's a berry bad place to go, missus, an' I'se drefful afeered to hab yo' bressed sel' go dar. I'se 'feered somet'in' happen dat I can't sabe yo' from."

"So it is me you are so fearful for and not your precious self?"

"Sartin, missus. I ride dar like de win'! But dem ha'nts are de berry debbil arter purty folks, an' I heerd dat dem witches ride dem off like dey wuz broomhandles. 'Pears like we hab got jess 'bout de right time to get home in."

"And see the old Granary. If you say this is the way, I will go ahead. Surely you are not afraid to follow where I lead." Without stopping for his reply, Aurian guided

Maze along the overgrown roadway distinguished from the unbroken earth by its carpet of green grass and slightly raised surface.

Walled in by dense woods, the abandoned road grew fainter and darker as they advanced, until Aurian had to stop occasionally to part the intruding growth with her whip, to escape the attacks of the interlocking branches. An unnatural silence hung over the scene, even the song of the river dying away to a low murmur. Once the sharp hiss from a near-by clump of hazels warned the riders of the close proximity of a venomous reptile, and immediately after a gray, sinuous form wriggled itself around an anthill and disappeared among the leaves beyond.

The ruined mill stood about a mile from the main road, and Aurian was beginning to think they had taken the wrong course after all, when she caught sight of a skeleton-like structure through the trees ahead.

"We are almost there, S'posen!" she said, with a breath of relief. "I am quite sure I can see the old Granary."

"I s'pecs' dat am so," replied her companion with a dubious shake of the head; "but I wanter tell yo' no good am comin' ob dis harum-darum bizness. Dem ha'nts hain't pussons to be meddled wiv, suah. Huh! I fot I heerd dem den. Dar! dar dey go suah! De good Lord forgib dis po' darky fo' follerin' his——"

"Stop your noise, you silly scarecrow," warned Aurian, listening intently for a repetition of the faint sound borne to their ears. She hadn't long to wait before it came louder and plainer than before, the unmistakable cry of a person in great agony. S'posen nearly fell from his seat, while his dusky feature grew yellow under the spell of his fright and a cold perspiration of horror broke out in huge beads all over his ebony countenance.

"Oh, de good Lord! how's I goin' to git 'way from dis drefful place wiv dat fool gal——"

Aurian checked his cry of terror with a stroke of her

whip, just as a third moan reached their ears. Seeing that it would be difficult to ride nearer the place, she prepared to dismount, saying to S'posen Jones:

"Hold Maze's bridle until I get back. Remember you are not to leave this place under any consideration."

"Don' s'pees I'll be able in a minnit or two. Hy! dar's dat ha'nt ag'in. De boys don' tole me de berry debbil lib down hyur."

Without stopping to hear the words of her frightened attendant, Aurian pushed her way through the tangled undergrowth, until she had reached a small opening in front of the deserted building upon which sun and storm, those grim executors of Father Time, had long since foreclosed their mortgage.

The mill had been a structure of considerable size, and a portion of it two stories in height. The southern half had been built on stone piers rising from the river, which had a deep bed with rocky, perpendicular banks. The bare, gaunt timbers alone of this part remained to speak of its former proportions. The northern end, though nearly roofless, was in a far better state of preservation, the walls still standing, overgrown with moss, and the entire eastern side covered by a spreading woodbine, its reddish leaves standing out in bold relief on the dull background. As its name would seem to indicate, the old Granary had been intended for a grist mill, though lumber had been sawed here at some time, as witnessed by the rust-eaten saw lying on the carriage.

But Aurian saw very little of all this, as she paused to listen for the sounds that had attracted her attention. She did not have long to wait before the cry was again heard, though fainter than before. Satisfying herself that it came from the further side of the ruins, she ran in that direction, soon reaching one of the windows, or openings where windows had once been, when she looked within the gloomy place.

Her eyes were guided by a sound at the opposite side, and she discovered a man hanging from the timbers of the second floor. At least she could see his lower limbs and feet dangling in the air, while one arm was in sight. He seemed to be held there between two timbers, while he was struggling in vain to free himself. In answer to her greeting, a dark face framed in with a fringe of short, knotty hair of mingling black and white peered suddenly down from the cobwebs and darkness above, while a voice with that unmistakable African dialect demanded :

“Who dar?”

“A friend. What has happened to you?”

“Oh, massa—I mean, missus—I se don’ fo’ dis time. I se cotched atween dese tim’ers an’ dar’s I hilt like a ‘possum atween two rocks.”

“Can’t they be raised if you had help?”

“I s’pose so; but don’ yo’ go fo’ help, missus. Ol’ Dan’l will stay right hyur ef yo’ won’t let unnybuddy ’sturb him. He berry comf’ble.”

“But you can’t stay there. I will call my servant, and perhaps he and I can lift the timbers so you can get free.”

“Hain’t dar nobuddy wid yo’ but yo’ nigger?” asked the imprisoned man with an earnestness she recalled vividly when the affair was all over. In her excitement she failed to notice the strange effect her offer of assistance gave the negro.

“Only S’posen Jones; but I can send him to Sylvania for as much help as we shall need if he and I can not free you,” and without waiting to hear his repeated remonstrance against seeking assistance, she ran back to where S’posen Jones was awaiting her. Attributing the same cause to her haste as he felt in his own desire to get away from the ill-omened locality, S’posen gladly and with unusual celerity for him, headed the horses toward home, and stood ready to assist her into her seat.

“No, S’posen! we are not going to leave yet. Tie the

horses as quickly as you can, and then come with me. There is a man held fast between a couple of the timbers of the old mill. He is a negro, and if we can't get him clear, you will have to ride to Sylvania for help; but we will try first and see what we can do."

"Yo' suah it am a real live nigger, missus, an' no ha'nt?"

"Of course I am. How slowly you move! Let me have Maze's rein."

Not without some misgivings S'posen followed his mistress to the old ruins, until he had caught sight of the unfortunate man pinned under one of the timbers, and held there as if in a vise.

"Can't you climb up there, S'posen?" asked Aurian "I don't see how I am going to help you very much. Be careful; those timbers are poor old things; look out you don't fall."

The clumsy negro, after repeated attempts, succeeded in ascending to the second story; but when he tried to raise the weight from the imprisoned man, he found even his great strength unequal to the task.

"'Pears yit do lift a leetle," said the old negro encouragingly.

"If I had a long pole to use as a lever I might be able to help you," declared Aurian. "Hold on while I see what I can find."

She was more successful than she might have expected, and in a moment she reappeared from the farther part of the building with a long, hornbeam pole, which had evidently done good service in years long since gone as a lever. Adjusting this, with the assistance of S'posen, so the proper purchase was obtained, by standing upon a pile of debris fallen from the decayed walls, she lent her strength to that of her attendant, when the offensive timber was raised so far that the prisoner was enabled to free himself, at the same time losing his balance and falling heavily to the floor below.

He soon rallied, however, and before Miss Lancier could reach his side, he had started to a sitting posture, and was staring around him like one pursued by enemies.

"Are you injured so you cannot stand alone?" asked Aurian. "If you are able to sit in the saddle S'posen shall take you to Sylvania, where you shall have good care. If you do not think you can ride so far on horseback, S'posen shall go home for a 'cart to take you there."

"I'se berry t'ankful to yo', missus; yo's berry kind to an ol' man, but I'se berry comf'ble hyur. I don' t'ink I'se berry bad hu't; yo' see de tim'er didn't press berry hard on me, but jess hild de ol' man so he couldn't stir. I'se sorry to boddered yo', but yo' can go now. I'se ain't nuff 'count fer sich a fine lady as yo' to bodder wiv."

Underlying his words was an anxiety even yet Aurian did not notice, and attributing his refusal of her proffered aid to a desire not to be of any trouble to her, Aurian would not listen to him. S'posen was told to help him up, and with her assistance the negro was enabled to regain his feet.

"Where do you live?" asked Aurian, finding that he was not injured as severely as she had expected.

"I—'way ober de mount'ins, missus. I'se powerful glad fo' yo' hel'." Then he added, as if feeling that his explanation had not been sufficient: "Yo' see I'se a free nigger, missus; an' I wuz comin' ober to see Uncle Frostus, an' somehow I s'pec's I'se lost my way. But yo' needn't worrit, honey; de ol' man wull git dar in time."

"Uncle Frost is dead and Aunt Debby is stopping at Sylvania, my home. S'posen, bring down Gyp here, and we will see if the poor man cannot ride up to Sylvania. You can walk beside him."

Murmuring over something she did not hear, S'posen went after the horse, and when she had got out of patience waiting for him, he returned with Black Gyp.

"Bushes berry bad to git fro'," he said simply, as he helped the old man into the saddle.

"Go ahead to Sylvania," ordered Aurian. "I will overtake you before you reach the main road."

"Sartin, Missus Orry," replied S'posen, ducking his head and leading Black Gyp away from the lonely scene he was only too glad to leave.

Aurian had sought this isolated place with a desire to see the spot where the unfortunate Mrs. Berners had met her fate, though she could not convince her own mind that she had any tangible reason for doing so. "It must be my morbid curiosity," she said to herself, as she turned from watching S'posen and his charge to look more closely at the old ruins than she had before. And as she gazed on the ruin and desolation the years had woven about the spot once bustling with life and activity, the long-forgotten story of him who had built the old Granary came by piece-meal back into her mind. His mother was a Lancier, and his father's mother a Southard, so the blood of the two families was in his veins. It had proved anything but a happy mixture, for his quarrelsome nature had not only driven the families apart, but had estranged himself from his wife. In gloomy seclusion he had then lived and worked at his mill on the Lash, never seeing any one, save those who came to him with their grain to be ground. Finally, one man going as usual with his grist to the mill, returned saying that the miller's helper was missing. If there had been foul play no one was able to say that the gruff old miller had done the deed. But the suspicions thrown about him so worried and irritated the other that he swore by all that was good and bad that he would never shut down his mill, or leave his post of duty until the missing man returned, or the river went dry. Thus day by day, and night after night, the hum of the machinery continued without a break until the dusty figure of him who commanded it grew gaunt and haggard. But there must be an end to this unequal trial, and one day the old miller was found stark and silent at his post, the huge waterwheel

still in motion and the ponderous stones grinding each other into flour, having nothing else to crush. From that time, stories became current among the uneducated and superstitious of a specter miller on duty at the old Granary. Many of those who had the hardihood to approach the gloomy place declared that often by day, and in the still hours of night, the rumble of the waterwheel and the steady grinding of the stones could be heard, while the dust-covered figure of the miller flitted to and fro on his ceaseless round of duties. These reports, if nothing else, soon gave the Mill on the Lash an uncanny reputation and caused it to be avoided by ignorant people.

Aurian had paused at the summit of the grassy slope leading down to the main entrance to the mill, a door long since unhinged and fallen into a heap of decayed matter, the bed for a growth of rank weeds. A sharp whirring of wings among these told of the presence of a humming bird, "monarch of all he surveyed." Farther up the valley the shrill notes of a catbird broke with a melodious key the silence of the woods; and then a strong wave of wind, scented with the fragrance of the pines, came rushing over the forest sea, the innumerable tree tops nodding to each other friendly greeting, while the unnumbered hosts of leaves beckoned and called to one another in that language which makes the whole world kin.

CHAPTER VIII.

AURIAN MEETS CARROLL SOUTHARD.

THE sound of a footstep near at hand arrested Aurian's attention, and upon turning around she was surprised to see Carroll Southard approaching. At sight of her he suddenly stopped, and then quickly raising his hat, advanced to her side:

"I thought it was your horse I saw just back here, but I could not flatter myself that I was to be so favored as to meet you, Miss Lancier. How is it I find you in this forsaken spot, and if I mistake not alone?"

"Perhaps I might with as good reason ask you the same question, Mr. Southard. But if you think I came alone you are mistaken, for my servant has barely left me. If you came by the path you must have seen him, a burly young negro with a black horse," forgetting for the moment S'posen's companion.

"I did not see him, and I can't say that I am sorry he has gone away, as I am now enabled to speak with the very person of all others whom I have been wanting to see. It has been a long time since we were last together, if I except that meeting at Uncle Frost's cabin. I hope you suffered nothing more than for the time from that stormy adventure."

"Nothing, I thank you. But how was it you appeared so opportunely—at least opportunely for me—upon that stormy scene?"

"I had reached this vicinity that afternoon, just from my home in the North, and I was on my way to Graymont,

when a desire I could not overcome caused me to pay a visit to Uncle Frost. You see he was the one connecting link that bound me to the old place. Now he is gone. Aunt Debby I judge is at Sylvania."

"Yes. How did you find Graymont?"

"Desolate, Miss Lancier. Is it possible you have never seen the old place of late years?"

"I have not seen it since you went away. A deserted homestead always gives me the heartache. I suppose I am foolish, but nothing seems so lonesome to me as an abandoned house. I am never afraid in the forest, but in an old, unoccupied house I am as timid as a bird."

"Graymont is quite in ruins now. Why, the old Granary here hardly looks worse. I did come back with the intention of fixing it up. Perhaps I shall; I cannot tell yet."

"And bring a Northern bride down here to share it with you."

"Miss Lancier—Aurian, as I feel I have a right to call you for old acquaintance sake—may I ask you a question? Do not blush, for I should have tried to be less abrupt had it not been the great question of my life. But it refers to a matter very near to my heart. Uncle Frost told you his strange story of this old mill?"

The earnestness as well as the abruptness with which he asked the question confused her, and at a loss what to say, she turned away to delay her reply long enough to speak calmly. "How beautiful the sunlight falls on yonder forest! How much the variegated foliage looks like a great, green cloud suspended on huge columns. Yes; Uncle Frost told me his story; in fact, he sent for me to come up to hear it, though of course I did not know what he had to tell, else I should not have gone."

"What did you think of it?" he asked eagerly. "I speak of this freely, Aurian, as I want you to answer me, for you know all about the shadow that hangs over my

name. I do not believe father ever knowingly wronged a person in the world. Does not the very act of freeing his slaves show that he had a true sense of justice? I think if he had a failing it was a leaning toward an over-confidence in other men. If this had not been the case he would never have intrusted that rascally Cuttytower to take possession of Graymont. That was father's greatest mistake I believe, but as that has never injured one more than myself, I do not murmur."

"Have you ever found where Mr. Cuttytower went?"

"Never. When he had robbed Graymont of all that he could, he very considerately betook himself out of the way, without leaving a trace of his whereabouts. He was evidently a shrewd one. Does your father still continue to speak of the Southards as bitterly as ever?"

"Never to my knowledge has the name been mentioned in our house since you went away. I have never dared to mention it, and he has always avoided it."

"Strange. But as far as I have been able to get at the bottom of the matter, it was the old miller, Durand, who started the trouble, and he was as much a Lancier as a Southard. Still I hail it as a good omen that your father has allowed us to meet as freely as he might have done to the children of his best friend."

"I have often wondered why he did, and at the same time feeling so bitter against your relatives. There is a mystery I do not understand. I should not dare to ask you to come to the house until I had spoken to him of you."

"Nor I to come. But did Uncle Frost describe that man with father so you could recognize him? It baffles me who it could have been."

"So it does me. It all seems very strange. I suppose I was foolish, but I was anxious to see the place, and I must confess it was that alone which brought me here this afternoon. Will you go down with me to view the sad scene?"

"I am afraid it is not safe to do so. Let us walk back

toward your horse. There is so much I want to say I am at a loss how to begin. It is strange a man should want to come back here into the wilderness to locate, when there was just as good a privilege nearer the road."

He started in the direction where Maze was standing, very much to her surprise.

"Afraid it is not safe to enter the old mill; is that what you mean, Mr. Southard?"

"Yes; I would not have you incur any needless peril, Aurian."

"But I have been in there this very afternoon. And I forgot to tell you the adventure I had; how stupid of me! I found a negro who had somehow fallen under one of the timbers so that he was unable to get away. With the help of my servant, I succeeded in getting him out, and I sent him to Sylvania to be cared for. Poor fellow! he looked so nearly used up I pitied him. Why! what has happened? Are you ill, Mr. Southard?"

"A negro in the old mill?" he cried. "Was he an old man and somewhat bent in figure?"

"Yes. Then you know him. How glad I am now that I was in season to help him."

"I am afraid your generous act will bring you trouble, Aurian, though God knows it ought not to. Aurian, that poor negro was a fugitive slave!"

It was now her turn to show alarm, and she caught at his arm, as she said:

"A fugitive slave, Carroll? You can not mean it! And I have sent him to Sylvania. What will father say?"

"He cannot blame you, for you did a noble act in good faith. Nobody can blame you, though no punishment is considered too heavy for one who has aided a colored brother to gain his freedom in this benighted land. What a curse slavery is! Forgive me, for I meant not to speak thus to you."

"But the thought was in your mind. Perhaps you are

right, though I may be wrong in saying as much. Father and Robert both say the South could not get along without their slaves, and that the North has no right to take them away from their owners."

"In a certain sense it has no right to do so, neither has the South any right to hold a race in bondage. Our constitution declares that all men are created equal, and then it directly breaks it by allowing slavery. But this is not a pleasant subject for us to discuss. Of course I have lived North so long in a very hotbed of abolitionism that I have naturally become imbued with something of their spirit. But grave trouble is sure to arise from this question, and war seems inevitable. God pity poor Maryland in that hour, for she is sure to become the battleground of the contending armies."

"I hope it will never come. Why can't this be settled without going to war? But you may be mistaken in regard to the negro I found here being a runaway slave. He told me he was free."

"So the poor fellow hoped he was. I happened to know about his case, as I found him hiding at Graymont when I got there. He begged of me not to give him up, asking that I would kill him instead. I learned that he had belonged to Jason Evans over in Wirtzburg, and from his account he had been through enough to kill an ordinary man. He showed me the wounds on his body, where he had been beaten by his unmerciful master. Ah, it is such men as Jason Evans that arouse the feelings of all disinterested persons against slavery. I gave the nearly starved fellow some food, and helped him to get here. Well, I suppose I might as well be honest to you, I was intending to get him over the line to-night into the free States. But this has sadly disarranged my plans."

"I am sorry I unintentionally interfered with your plans, though he could not have remained there much longer. But do you realize the fearful risks you are taking in doing what you are?"

"Perfectly; but it is for you I fear most now. Though there is much more I want to say, it will be safest for you to hasten home at once. Let no one suspect the truth, but I advise you to get the negro off your hands as soon as possible. If you overtake your servant before you reach Sylvania have him conduct old Daniel anywhere but to Sylvania. Let him leave him on the mountain road, and the fugitive will look out for himself."

Though he had not said so, Aurian knew that he meant that he would look after him then, thus she hastened to say, as they started toward Maze:

"You will not imperil your life further in assisting him? Remember your life is worth more than his, and——"

"I will look out for myself, Aurian. I trust you will get safely home. What a fine horse you have. Your father was always noted for his excellent stock of horses. Let me go ahead and brush back the bushes."

He had assisted her into the seat, and was about to step forward to carry out his intentions of pulling aside an officious birch which had thrust itself into the pathway, when the hoof-strokes of a horse fell upon their ears, causing Aurian to quickly check the advance of Maze, while her companion turned an anxious gaze ahead.

"It is a body of horsemen!" he said, "and they are coming this way. Ride on, Miss Lancier, as fast as you can. It will not do for you to be found here in my company."

"Do they mean harm to you?"

"Perhaps so; it is on account of that negro. But never mind me; ride on, and if you meet them tell them as plausible a story as you can, but above all things do not let them know you have met me here. I ask this for your sake."

The steady thud, thud, thud of heavy feet falling on the grass-grown path was growing plainer and nearer each moment, warning her of the necessity of swift action if she hoped to make it effectual.

"It may be best for you as well as me to ride on," she said quickly. "Look well to your own safety; good-by." Without waiting for his reply, she urged Maze forward at a brisk walk. Looking back once she saw Carroll Southard disappearing into the old mill. At sight of her countenance, he waved his hand to her, vanishing the next instant behind the ruined wall of the old Granary.

Looking again forward in a listening attitude, she was relieved in her mind to find that the sound of the horsemen had abruptly ceased. As if to prove her loneliness, at that moment the plaintive cry of a whip-poor-will ascended from the valley below, to be answered quickly by a scream of mocking mournfulness from a catbird above the old Granary. A wandering breeze borne down from the mountain on the forest's leafy arms brought the refreshing coolness of early evening, and the countless leaves nodding one to another like so many airy messengers from the distant peaks whispering their secrets sent abroad the wild news of the day-king's waning power on the sunny heights.

Anxious to reach the main road as soon as possible, Aurian touched Maze gently with her whip; but the faithful animal had barely entered upon a trot, when she found herself confronted by a body of horsemen drawn up across the narrow path, and she was commanded to stop.

CHAPTER IX.

CONFIDENTIAL MOMENTS—S'POSEN JONES' REMARKABLE RIDE.

ESTEN BERNERS had been more disappointed at Aurian's failure to stop and exchange a few words with him than she had dreamed, and he had watched her out of sight with a feeling of vexation he found difficult to choke down. In fact, the longer he pondered upon the matter the more bitter his resentment became.

"She is not usually in such a rush," he mused, "and just when I wished so much to speak of a matter of such grave importance to her as well as to me, she might have given me a moment's time. I would not have detained her long. I have a mind to follow; but that would be uncivil. I can wait here until she returns, when perhaps she will favor me with a short talk," and with this conclusion he was careful not to pass beyond sight of the highway, while he impatiently looked for her coming.

Finally he concluded it would do no harm for him to ride in the direction she had taken, not intending to go far but to be somewhere so he could ride home with her. This decision he carried into effect by throwing the saddle on the back of his horse and riding leisurely down the Sharpsburg turnpike until he had come within sight of the bridge spanning the Lash. There his sharp eye saw the imprints left in the soft road by the horses ridden by Aurian and her colored attendant, and he did not fail to see that they had turned into the path leading at right angle to the highway.

"Ha, Miss Aurian! I read your secret now. You are on a visit to the old Granary. So Uncle Frost's story was not without its effect upon you. I have wanted to go there myself, but I have not had the courage—I did not mean that. But I have not had the desire to do so yet. I may have. Mother, the wrong done you shall yet be righted; I swear it."

Musing thus he rode slowly upon the old moss-grown bridge connecting the two banks of the stream, and he fell to watching the running water, until mile after mile had sped past him without a trace of weariness or of sadness, singing the same old song over and over again, the rapids joining regularly in the chorus. Soon he grew tired of this, or he was not in a mood then to listen always and never to reply. He had too much upon his mind to say himself. From the stream, with its endless song, he fell to scanning the distant landscape, and then he found a more satisfying occupation in noting the slow-sinking of the westering sun, more satisfying because it marked the passage of that time which must bring him the object of his waiting. Soon the orb of day reached the corrugated brow of the horizon, where it became impaled for awhile on one of the jagged mountain splinters pinning the sky to the earth. Sunsets have a peculiar fascination for those of his dreamy, poetical temperament, and he was wont to read in them secrets he would not have dared to whisper to another.

"The little arrows of light shooting out from the central orb deepen into the blue too rapidly to warrant a pleasant day for the morrow," he said half aloud. "I don't like—"

"Halloo, mister!" broke in a sharp voice upon his musings, causing him to turn sharply about, when he beheld to his amazement half a dozen horsemen who had approached along the sandy road without attracting his attention. "Have you seen a man pass this way—halloo, is that you, Berners?"

"I leave it with you to decide, Blandon. What has called you down this way?"

"We are after that infernal young abolitionist of Graymont, who has been 'running off one of Evans' niggers. Not that the nigger is of much account; but it is the principle concerned in the matter. Have you seen him? The boys have got a good bit of rope for him along with the nigger, and you can count upon them to use it. It will do the hot-heads of the North good to have an example made of one of them."

"You mean Carroll Southard, I suppose," said Esten Berners, hardly knowing what reply to make. "No; I have not seen him. He would not be likely to come this way, would he?"

"We know he has. We believe he or the nig or both are hiding at the old Granary. It would be a fitting place to find one or both of them. I believe the path leading to the old mill turns off somewhere near this bridge, but for my life I cannot tell just the place. Come, show us the way."

Estern Berners' first thought was of Aurian Lancier, and he wondered what course was best for him to follow in order to spare her the consequence of a meeting with this warlike party. The impatience of the gang allowed him little time for thought, and finding that he could do no better he reluctantly led the way toward the old Granary, with the others following closely upon his heels. At the sound of an approaching rider the leader of the party ordered a halt, when they silently awaited the coming of the other.

Esten Berners was not surprised at beholding Aurian, while ejaculations more forcible than polite came from those behind him at sight of a woman where they had expected to meet a hunted slave or his would-be deliverer.

"Have no fear, Miss Lancier," Berners hastened to say, noting the look of alarm on her countenance. "You are in no danger. These men here are looking for a runaway

nigger who is supposed to be hiding somewhere in this vicinity."

"And that young heir of Graymont," spoke up Blandon. "They are hiding at the old Granary. Have you been down that way?"

"Yes, sir," replied Aurian firmly, though she wondered how she could appear so calm. "I have just come from there."

"Didn't you see that young Southard there?" demanded Blandon, crowding his horse forward abreast of Esten Berners' animal.

"He could not have been there or I should have seen him."

"And the nigger?"

"I am sure he is not there."

"Funny!" supplementing his statement with an oath. "Both have been seen coming this way. Beware how you try to deceive us. It—"

"Mr. Blandon," said Esten Berners sharply, turning to his companion, "the loyalty of a Lancier is beyond dispute. If you want to search the old mill do so, but I vouch for the word of Miss Lancier. It is my opinion you are on the wrong track, and that you are losing valuable time beating about this bush. Shall I have the pleasure of escorting you home, Miss Lancier?"

"You are very kind, Mr. Berners," replied Aurian, with a breath of relief. "If Mr. Southard or the negro had been at the mill I must of necessity have seen them." She was on dangerous ground, but she knew it would not do to falter then. What if they should insist on visiting the old Granary after all she had said? She realized that not only Carroll Southard's safety but her own was at stake. To her great joy therefore she heard Blandon's command:

"Right about face, boys! The dogs must have gone as I thought at first, to Whippet's swamp. Move on, lively!" and nodding an adieu to Esten and Aurian, the little cavalcade soon disappeared from sight.

"I am very grateful to you, Mr. Berners," said Aurian, "for I am sure I should have fared poorly at the hands of those men. I didn't know what to think when I first saw them, with you at their lead."

"It was an awkward situation for me, Miss Lancier, I assure you, but it was the best I could do under the circumstances, and as affairs turned I hail it as a very fortunate thing."

"Did they come from the way of Sylvania?"

"Oh, no; they came from Wirtzburg, or that direction. I was out for a canter and met them at Lash bridge. But where is that shiftless S'posen Jones?"

"Didn't you meet him on your way down here?" asked Aurian, hardly daring to trust herself to speak.

"Haven't seen a thing of him. He can't have gone up the Sylvania road. Is it possible he deserted you?"

"It is. He was so frightened at the thought of going to the old mill that I had to leave him a short distance this side with the horse and when I got back——"

"He was gone! That is as much as you could expect of him. It is impossible to find a black in this vicinity that will go near the old Granary. I don't know as I blame them much; it is a gloomy place. I do not like to go there myself."

As Aurian made no reply to this, he relapsed into silence and nothing further was said until they had reached the road, when he made another attempt to keep up the conversation.

"I am afraid your little adventure has robbed you of your usual good spirits; you do not seem like yourself."

"I was thinking that, too. I hope you will excuse me. An old place like that always affects me strangely. Did you ever hear what became of Mr. Durand's wife?"

"I think she did not live many years after he met his singular end."

"If I am not mistaken there was a child."

"Yes, a daughter, though I do not know what became of her. Come to think of it, it is strange I should not have heard. I will ask father; he seems to know more about these matters than any one else. By the way, do you suppose Southard has been foolish enough to get mixed up in such an affair as they say?"

"Pray what means do you think I have knowing of the matter? I am sorry if he has. What an endless amount of trouble the negroes make."

"Very true; and yet they are the life of the South. I hear that Robert is espousing the abolition cause."

The remark was given as a sort of interjection, but Aurian was never more amazed in her life. "What do you mean, Mr. Berners?"

"No offense, I assure you. I was merely repeating what is becoming town talk."

"It is not so—it cannot be. You know Robert better than that. He and father both are staunch and true to the welfare of the South."

"Just what I have said. I hope he is not making a mistake."

"Let's whip up our horses. Night comes on fast after these autumn sunsets. Besides I am anxious in regard to that foolish S'posen."

He acquiesced to her wishes, and riding at a smart canter they soon came in sight of Sylvania. Inwardly blaming himself for having allowed the opportunity to pass without freeing his mind of the subject uppermost in his thoughts, Esten bade her good night in front of his home. Pulling the bridle from his horse's head and the saddle from its back, he sulkily left the animal to shift for itself, while he strode into the house, saying to himself:

"The storm is brewing. I read it like an open book. Then, you may be glad to flee to my arms for protection. I half believe that Southard was at the ruined mill. What if he was! I think I will pay the old ruins a visit myself

after supper. If I should meet him there—” He had reached the house, and his thoughts were suddenly cut short by the appearance of his father.

Though condemning herself for the hypocritical part she was acting, Aurian felt that her best course was to ride up to the manor and boldly call for S’posen.

Accordingly when she was told that he had not been seen since going away with her, she felt almost as surprised as the rest, though her astonishment was leavened with a relief she could scarcely understand. How and where had the stupid negro, as he generally showed himself, so strangely disappeared? It is not necessary to say that she anxiously awaited his appearance. But late into the evening, when her father and Robert had returned from Annapolis, S’posen Jones was still missing.

Major Lancier was unusually silent, while Robert immediately sought his room without speaking even to Aurian. Half an hour later everything was silent about Sylvan Manor, though there was one light still burning and a white face pressed often to the window pane, as Aurian watched and waited for S’posen Jones. Finally she gave up her vigil and sought her couch.

She did not awaken as early as usual in the morning, but when she arose the first voice that greeted her ear was that of S’posen Jones! Hastening to the kitchen she found him entertaining a circle of spellbound listeners with an account of his adventures which put Munchausen completely out of sight as a narrator of the wonderful and mysterious.

“Yit am de wonderfulest truf dat I ebber tol’,” he was saying. “I knowed no good could come ob goin’ to dat harum-darum place, an’ Missus Orry mus’ hab fel’ so, too, fo’ she tol’ me to keep a mighty clus eye on dem hosses, while she wuz gone to s’pec’ de ol’ mill. I’se no fool nigger to git kotched nappin’ I tell yo’, so I kept dese eyes ob mine jess spread, an’ I stood ready to rush to Missus

Orry's resky de minnit I hear her lubly voice a-callin' fo' hel' as I knowed she w'u'd be as soon as dem ha'nts found out she wuz prowlin' round dem primises. But yit proved dey spied de hosses afore dey did her, or wot wuz more likely, dey had pity fo' her, an' so took fo' de yanimals. Emmyway de fust I knowed two ob de bigges' ha'nts yo' eber see jes lept out'n dem bushes an' astride dem hosses right afore my eyes! One ob dem wuz de spook ob Massa Durand suah's yo' bo'n, an' de udder wuz a 'menjus big nigger—bigger den me—bigger dan Sam Patch dar!"

At this point in his thrilling narrative S'posen Jones paused, as if to enjoy the awful interest he had aroused among his associates. While he looked he scratched his woolly pate, and finally resumed:

"Did I holler fo' hel'? Neber a holler from dis coon. Of coarse I fel' mos' fo' Missus Orry's Maze, an' I jess lept like de win' to de po' scart creature, an' a-plantin' my big, brack fis' in de midst ob ol' Durant's ha'nt, I breshed de grinnin' critter inter de bresh jess as yo' w'u'd knock ober a fly. Den I wheeled to cl'ar dat brack imp off'n Brack Gyp. But dat dar brack ha'nt too sha'p to wait fo' my fis', an' wiv one ob dem ha'nt laughs he chuncked de spurs to de po' frightened hoss, an' 'way de critter spun like de win'! W'at yo' don' den, Sam Patch? Yo' great lubber, yo' jess stood an' grin. W'at yo' do, Wash Scrimp? Yo' tall, lean brack nigger, yo' jess stood an' shook. W'at yo' don', Abrum Smith Jonah Jacskon? Yo' long-j'nted scarecrow, yo' jess run fo' yo' good-fo'-nuffin life. W'at yo'd don', Billingsgate Fish Noscrimble? Yo' cross-eyed—"

"Well, what did you do, S'posen Jones?" interrupted Aurian, who was fearful that the story-teller's catalogue of questions might last indefinitely.

"Bress me ef hyur ain't Missy Orry!" cried the surprised S'posen. "I'se been turrible anxious 'bout you, missus. I s'pec's dem ha'nts hab yo' suah. I s'pecs yo'

awful mad wiv dis po' ol' nig, but fore de good Lord, Missus Orry, I do whut I fink wuz bes'."

"Don't be alarmed about that, S'posen. I am not going to blame you for anything you did."

"Not a ti'ng, missus, suah?"

"Not a thing that I know of, S'posen. So go ahead and tell us how you escaped and what became of your ha'nt."

With a show of relief at getting out of what he must have considered a difficult situation, S'posen continued:

"I s'pec's yo' t'ink I am de bigges' liar dat eber libed, Missus Orry, but dis berry fac' I'se goin' to propoun' am de bigges' an' awfulles' truf I can explode. W'en I see dat ha'nt a-ridin' off wiv po' Gyp, I jess made one desprit lept to bresh dat t'ief off, but I jess missed him! But I wuz spry 'nough to kotch dat hoss' tail in my pow'ful grasp, an' dar I hild. How dat hoss did fly, an' dat air ha'nt a-proddin' him all de time, an' I a-streamin' at his tail! I guess yo'd been s'prised to see us! I s'pec's dat ride wuz kept up all night—ennyway po' Gyp wuz 'bout dead w'en dat ha'nt, tired hissel' I s'pose, slid off'n his back an' 'speared in de darkness ob de night."

"But where was your ha'nt by that time, S'posen?" as the other stopped to get his breath.

"Way ober de line ob freedom, missus. I hopes yo' don' blame po' me fo' lettin' him ride Brack Gyp so. Yo' see I didn't hab time to git more'n one hand-holt on dat hosses tail. If I had had eruth'er bref I s'pec's I c'u'd stopped him afore."

"Never mind, as long as you got Gyp home all right," said Aurian, leaving the negro to still further enlighten his companions with his remarkable story, all of which was received with a credulity of astonishing susceptibility by his knot of dusky hearers.

"What is this nonsense S'posen Jones is telling those negroes?" asked Major Lancier as Aurian joined him in the dining-room.

"Oh, his explanation of a fright he imagines he received at the old Granary yesterday. It has been so long since I had visited the old place," she continued, noticing his look of wonder, "that I made the ruins the object of an outing in the afternoon."

"Very unwise of you, my daughter. The Mill on the Lash is not a suitable place for an unprotected woman to go."

"Who was the Durand of whom they tell such strange stories, father?"

"He was old Cal Durand, and a fool to boot! If that isn't sufficient you can apply any epithet you choose to him with equal propriety," he replied, speaking with unusual crustiness. "I should advise you, my daughter, never to go near the unfortunate spot again unless Robert or I can accompany you."

Now that the matter had been broached, Aurian resolved to improve the opportunity to try and unravel the mystery which had been recently revived with such thrilling interest. Thus she boldly asked:

"Was he really such an evil-minded man? and is it true that he was related to the Southards and Lanciers?"

"Demme! what put that idea into your head? He was all Southard."

"But I have been told that his mother was a Lancier," she persisted.

"It takes more than a name to make some people kindred. If his mother was a Lancier, he was all Southard by nature. He was a wicked man."

"What became of his daughter, father?"

"What do you care of her? She lived and died as many others have done."

"You evade answering my questions, father. I don't wish to pry into other people's business; but I feel that this family matter concerns me to a certain extent. Did the trouble between the Lanciers and Southards begin with Mr. Durand?"

“Perhaps so. But look here, child, I have weightier matters than that foolish old family quarrel to bother myself about. Why don’t that laggardly Robert come? I have a bone to pick with him.”

“What has Robert done that has displeased you, father?”

“Done, the dog! He has done enough to send him from Sylvania—after I have taken him into my family—treated him as a son—then he turns upon me and bites me like a snake! But the hour of reckoning is at hand; let him beware! Is that him coming?”

Aurian had never seen her father in such a passion, and she trembled for the result.

CHAPTER X.

A STERN PURSUIT.

CARROLL SOUTHARD'S mind was filled with conflicting thoughts as he parted with Aurian Lancier and went toward the old Granary.

"This seems cowardly," he said half aloud, as he entered the ruins. "If harm should fall to her through this action of mine I could never forget that it was due to me. Strange that I should get into this miserable tangle, when my motives had been so purely peaceful. I had hoped to bring about a reconciliation between myself and the Lanciers, and through them see if something could not be done to restore my old home to its former state, though nothing it seems can lift this cloud from my life enough to induce me to go back there to live. Father, I wish I could lift the veil from those scenes. It seems to be the very worst would be lighter than this dark uncertainty. Now I have got into this plight over a poor old negro and am more helpless than ever. How quiet it seems! I wonder how she has managed to stop them from coming down here. What if they should take it into their heads to harm her? I must not allow that. If the worst should come it would be better for me to give myself up."

Without stopping longer in the old mill, he silently left the place by a rent in the wall down near to the river bank, to creep swiftly forward along the edge of the stream, realizing that he was incurring considerable risk in doing so. But in his anxiety over the fortunes of Aurian

he felt it his duty to be near in case the reckless riders should offer to molest her.

"In their present state of mind they are fitted for almost any deed of violence."

By continuing along the fringe of bushes lining the bank of the Lash, he was enabled to get in plain sight of the horsemen without being seen by them, just as Blandon urged his horse forward alongside of Esten Berners. The appearance of the young planter with the gang was a surprise to him; but as he listened to them he felt very thankful for the latter's presence. When at last he saw the riders turn back, a look of relief came over his countenance, and immediately after he had watched Aurian and her escort out of sight he pushed his way as rapidly as possible through the tangled growth, still keeping on in the direction followed by the river.

The fugitive kept ahead until coming in sight of the road near the Lash bridge, where he stopped in a thicket of hazels, not daring to step out into the highway until evening should throw its friendly mantle over the scene. It seemed so strange to him to be hiding thus like some criminal fleeing from justice that a sort of grim smile overspread his features, succeeded by a look of graver aspect.

As slowly and silently as the great host of light would eventually lift them, the dark wings of night settled over hill and valley, and the breathless evening air became sibilant with Nature's choristers ushering in with grand flourishes of song and melody the new king of earth.

From his concealment in some dark nook on the river's bank, a shrill-voiced catbird opened the serenade, a tree-toad quickly joining in the ringing notes, while the sharper treble of numerous crickets helped to awaken the dusky scene. Then, as the merry song ended and only the mournful strain of a distant whip-poor-will broke the solitude, a myriad of tiny lights flashed out from the deeper depths, flitting hither and thither in bewildering array,

until far and wide the gray gloom of night was starred and crinkled with these living lanterns.

Carroll Southard had already left his concealment, and advancing with rapid steps he soon reached the road near the bridge, when taking an opposite course from that leading to Sylvania he hurried along the highway. He had not gone far, however, before he heard footsteps behind him, and looking back he was surprised to find that he was followed.

Thinking at first that this pursuit was purely accidental, he kept on, gradually quickening his gait as he advanced, hoping to soon outdistance his unknown follower. To his surprise the other did not allow him to increase the space between them. Beginning to think that he had reason to fear the man, he glanced back over his shoulders to get a look at him. It was too dark to distinguish any one with certainty.

When this chase had continued for nearly half a mile, and the fugitive realized there was no reasonable possibility of leaving him, unless he took to flight, he resolved to turn and meet him. He might not be an enemy after all.

Thus Carroll Southard turned suddenly at bay, to calmly await the stranger's approach. He was not kept long in suspense before out of the shadows of the evening the well-known figure of Esten Berners took shape.

"Good-evening," he greeted. "I did not dream it was any one I knew or I should have stopped sooner."

"That might depend upon who it was," was the curt reply. "It looks very much as if you wanted to avoid me as long as you thought there was a chance of doing so."

"You speak in riddles. I am really pleased to meet you. It is a great satisfaction to meet an acquaintance where there are so many strange faces." He extended his hand as he spoke. Ignoring this the other exclaimed:

"You know better than to talk like that. There can be no pleasure in a meeting between you and I, Carroll Southard."



"Quick, Mr. Southard! into the saddle. Maze is the fleetest horse in this vicinity."—See page 97.

"Mr. Berners, your words pain me. I am sorry for the wound that rankles in your breast, but God knows it was no fault of mine that that unhappy deed was done. Did you hear *all* of Uncle Frost's story?"

"I did, and under the circumstances I was weak enough to let you slip through my fingers. But now I demand justice."

"In what way, Mr. Berners? If my life will atone for the injury done you it is at your command. I cannot think it will."

"Then you will give me satisfaction?"

"Not in the way you imply. That would not lift the shadow. If you want my life——"

"Stop! I do not know how to deal with you. I have no wish to be your murderer. I believe you are a coward."

"Were I, I could not face you so calmly with those words in my mind. Mr. Berners, have you stopped to think of the circumstances surrounding that unhappy affair, supposing it was not after all a delirious dream of a weak-minded old man? I say, have you looked this matter squarely in the eye and decided that my father was really to blame for your mother's untimely fate?"

"Perhaps not—perhaps not! I have been nearly crazed by the thought. It seems hard to have been thus robbed of a mother."

"You have my sympathy. My own mother was taken from me before I was old enough to remember her sweet face; and then my poor father went down with that cloud upon his fair name."

Esten Berners did not reply at once, but he walked nervously back and forth in the road. It was light enough to see that he was undergoing great torture. Suddenly he stopped, exclaiming:

"I hear horsemen coming, Mr. Southard. If I mistake not you are a fugitive."

"Under a most unfortunate combination of circumstances

I am. When I got back to Graymont I found a half dead negro, who acknowledged he was an escaping slave, concealed at the old place. He told such a pitiful story and showed such evidence of his past treatment that I was enlisted in his behalf to an extent that I gave him food and allowed him to remain in his concealment."

"Is he there now?"

"No."

"Running off slaves is pretty bad business for a man to be engaged in. They will hang you if they catch you."

"They shall never do that—at least alive. I believe dead men are indifferent to hanging."

"They are crossing Lash bridge," said Berners, unheeding the latter's words. "It is Blandon's party, and Blandon is the worst slave hunter within a hundred miles. I should advise you to be seeking a place of safety." The approaching horsemen had slackened their gait to a walk, but they must shortly reach the place where the two were standing.

"It would be useless for me to seek concealment, for you have an advantage—"

"John Evans is the most inhuman slaveholder in Virginia and Blandon the most cold-blooded hunter," broke in his companion. "I am going down to meet them, and as if I had never seen you."

Without stopping for a reply Esten Berners started down the road at a rapid gait, leaving Carroll Southard to look out for himself.

"He is a strange man," thought the latter; "but his heart is in the right place."

At that moment the horsemen stopped and he judged they were speaking to young Berners. If that was so they must have had an extended conversation, for it was fifteen minutes later before they rode leisurely past his place of concealment and disappeared in the distance.

With a feeling of relief he soon after left his covert, to

hasten on his way to Graymont, which he reached without further adventure.

It was nearly midnight when he came in sight of his old home, which loomed up so lonely and gloomy in the starlight that he could scarcely suppress a shudder as he continued to approach. The weather-beaten walls were fast showing the ravages of time, while the extensive grounds, stretching away on every side with a gradual slope, were choked with coarse weeds and bushes, that struck at him and whipped him as if to beat back an unwelcome invader into their domain. In front of the old mansion, which must have been a fine building in its prime, an English poplar with stark, scrawny branches and white trunk stood like a gaunt skeleton sentinel keeping watch and ward over the deserted homestead. This presentment was made more real by a gust of wind lifting the dead branches and smiting them against each other so that an uncanny rattling sound broke the solemn silence.

"A most undesirable place for one to seek a night's repose," exclaimed the fugitive involuntarily. "But I felt it would be my last chance to bid farewell to the scenes that are dear to me in spite of their sad associations. Ah, how brief are the works of man! It seems only yesterday the old spot was filled with life and beauty, where now not a single happy feature remains."

Continuing to advance as he spoke, he reached the threshold of the main entrance, when as he swung ajar the heavy door it creaked and groaned dismally on its rusty hinges. This was the signal for sharp cries and a hurrying and skurrying within, as numerous animal denizens which had taken up their abode here darted hither and thither at this disturbance of their peace.

Unmindful of these, and leaving the door open so as to be better enabled to find his way, Carroll Southard slowly threaded room after room, calling upon himself an attack from a mob of aroused bats at almost every turn.

Finally reaching a room in the south part of the main building, an apartment which had been his in the years of his early boyhood, he advanced to one of the windows, when leaning on the dusty sill he gazed for a long time out upon the starlit landscape. By daylight his position commanded a wide view of the surrounding country, it being possible for the beholder to look beyond the valley of the Potomac upon the mountains of Virginia. The sky was clear enough for him to follow the road quite distinctly, as it wound down the descending grade toward the distant woods, and as he maintained his solitary and aimless vigil he suddenly discovered the figure of a horseman coming slowly up the highway.

Wondering who could be abroad at that hour, he watched the rider, until to his surprise the latter turned his horse into the grounds of Graymont, heading the animal directly toward the old mansion.

By this time Carroll Southard began to regret that he had left the door open, but as it was too late now to remedy the mistake, he could only remain as silently as possible where he was, while he wondered what had brought this solitary horseman to that place then. An inkling of the truth came into his mind as he recognized the man as Blandon!

Dismounting near the old poplar, the slave hunter secured his horse from wandering, after which he boldly entered the ruins, showing very little caution if he expected to meet an enemy there.

The fugitive heard the other pass from room to room, until he realized the search would not be ended until his own apartment had been visited by the sleuthlike Blandon.

Accordingly he silently crossed the floor and closing the door secured it as best he could by crowding the blade of his pocket-knife in over the latch. He had barely accomplished this before the heavy steps of Blandon sounded on the creaking stairs. A moment later the slave hunter was

trying to open the door. The sound of hoof-strokes in front of the mansion caused Southard to glance out of the window in that direction, when he was dismayed at the sight of half a dozen riders.

"It looks as if they had got me pretty well cornered," he thought. At that moment Blandon tried the door.

Unarmed, and not wishing to take life if it could be avoided, he began to think of some way of escape. His only chance was by the window, which he hastily opened as the slave hunter began to pound furiously upon the door.

"Open!" he cried loudly. "We have hunted you down, and you might as well surrender without further trouble. It will be better for you."

Before he had finished speaking Carroll Southard was lowering himself from the window, which was on the opposite side of the mansion to that approached by his enemies. The next moment he dropped to the ground. At the same instant Blandon sent the door flying from its hinges.

Finding the room empty and the window open, the latter rushed to the place of exit, shouting to his men, who had already entered the house, to cut off the fugitive's flight.

Though considerably shaken up by his descent to the earth, Carroll Southard quickly regained his feet, to flee along in the shadow of the building. But he was not quick enough to escape the lynx eyes of his foe, and a pistol-shot was swiftly followed by a sharp twinge of pain in his left limb. Unheeding the wound in his excitement, the hunted man succeeded in gaining an old well at the rear of the mansion, where he so effectually secreted himself that even Blandon failed to find him. Fuming over his disappointment, the latter at last gave up, though he himself, with three others, remained on the premises until morning.

Knowing that it would not do for him to leave his concealment, Carroll suffered great pain from his wound.

The cold, damp atmosphere of the place chilled his whole frame, while he felt that his limb was swollen to a painful extent. Soon after sunrise he dared to venture from his retreat, though he knew the watchers were still about the premises. His limb was so stiff and swollen that he could barely stir. Slowly and cautiously he crawled away through the rank, tall grass and weeds, until he had gained the woods to the west of the mansion. But he was so nearly helpless that he advanced only with great pain and slowness. With the grim determination of his nature, however, he kept on and by mid-afternoon he came out upon the Wind River road near its junction with the Graymont highway. At this corner stood an old negro hut, long since abandoned, and managing to reach this he dropped upon the floor with a groan.

He had not laid there very long before the hoof-strokes of a horse fell on his ears.

"Let it be friend or enemy, I can go no further!" he exclaimed.

CHAPTER XI.

THE GRAYMONT FUGITIVE.

THE footstep heard by Aurian and her father had not been made by the expected Robert, but by the housekeeper, who, usually calm and unconcerned about matters, was now greatly excited.

“What is that crazy story S’posen Jones is setting the niggers all wild with? Major Lancier, I wish you would stop him at once. He will drive what little work there is in those creatures from them. And young Berners has been up here telling about how Carroll Southard has been caught trying to run off one of Old Evans’ niggers, and they have hung him down at the old Granary! Oh, dear me! what won’t happen next?”

Under ordinary circumstances Mrs. Ralston would sooner have bitten her tongue off than to mention the name of Southard before her master, and now that she had actually done it, she gazed about the room as if looking for an avenue of escape in case the worst should happen.

“You don’t mean that Carroll Southard has been captured, Mrs. Ralston?” Aurian cried, vexed the next moment for the words and the tone in which she had spoken them.

“That’s what I understood Mr. Berners to say, though I was so flustered that I may not have heard him correctly.”

“Zounds!” exclaimed the major, suddenly waking up to the situation. “What is all this babbling about? Has that young Southard got back into these parts again? I had hoped we had seen the last of him.”

"Yes, sir," replied the housekeeper faintly, and now that she had accomplished the mischief she hastened from the room.

"Pray what do you know about this scapegrace of Graymont, miss?" demanded Major Lancier, turning fiercely upon Aurian.

"I know that he came to Uncle Frost's house the night of the storm, as I saw him, though I did not have an opportunity to speak to him. The rest I have heard the same as you have."

"Well, I should like to catch him running off one of my niggers! He never would run off another. But it seems they have caught him, and if so I wouldn't give much for his life."

"Is it such a terrible thing, father, to assist an abused slave to escape?"

"Terrible thing?" demanded the owner of Sylvania. "What can be worse? It is worse than stealing; it is a crime for which there is but one adequate punishment."

"I think you might make an exception in the case of Jason Evans," declared a clear, ringing voice from the hall, and father and daughter turned to meet Robert, who was the calmest of the three. "It is such men as Jason Evans that have thrown the curse over slavery."

"Ho, young man! so you have dared to appear at last. Hold! not another step until you have explained your conduct."

"I do not understand you," replied Robert, and if he was feigning surprise he was a good actor.

"You know well enough what I mean, sir. All the town does, if you do not, and when you have learned it from the street babbler, come back and answer my question."

"I prefer to answer it without seeking that publicity," was the even reply.

Major Lancier was puzzled. He knew that his adopted son was too much of a Lancier to be pushed to the wall.

"I want to know if you have no better show of gratitude for all I have done for you than your conduct yesterday? I want to know if it was to fetter an old man's power that I have reared you from infancy as if you were my own son."

"You speak in riddles, father. I appreciate all you have done for me and in return I have always tried to act the part of an honorable son. Will you tell me in what manner I have incurred your displeasure now?"

Major Lancier had begun to pace the floor, but pausing excitedly in front of Robert, he cried:

"Are you a fool or do you think I am blind and deaf? Was it according to my teachings that you voted with the fanatics and cowards yesterday?"

"It was," came the calm, measured reply, startling both Aurian and her father; "and if you style yourself a fanatic and a coward, then I must plead guilty to the same infamous charge. But I cannot think you mean what you say, or you are laboring under a misapprehension."

"Please end this agony, Robert," interrupted Aurian. "I think father wants to know if you voted for your friends or your enemies yesterday."

"I can answer that very quickly. If you call the South my friend then I was not unfaithful to her. I trust you can say as much."

Major Lancier was dumfounded.

"What meant that babbling on the streets then? They told me you had betrayed old Maryland."

"Who, father? Show me the man and I will prove him to you a liar," and for the first time he began to show excitement.

Aurian came boldly to the rescue.

"You should have known Robert better, father. I should have sooner doubted my own fealty than his. Come, all this excitement is unfitting us for our morning meal. Let us lay aside politics long enough at least to get our sustenance of life."

"Pardon me, Robert," said the major, extending his hand. "Perhaps I was hasty, but I heard it said you were against us."

"I freely forgive you, father, for thinking so; but I gave no one reason to think I was not loyal to my State. I heard the name of Carroll Southard mentioned, if I was not mistaken. What has he been doing?"

Major Lancier felt somewhat humiliated by his hasty conduct, and now in amends he was quite willing to discuss even so unwelcome a subject as the fortune of a Southard. Aurian, eager to improve the unexpected opportunity, volunteered such information as she could give without betraying too much, in the hope she might learn something of the hunted man's fate. Neither her father nor Robert, it proved, knew more than she, or as much for that matter.

"I have always wanted to ask you one question, father. May I now, please?"

"Certainly, though I am not promising you an answer, understand."

"I assure you it is no idle curiosity that prompts me to want to know, but with all your bitterness toward the Southards, why did you allow Carroll and I ever to associate when we were children?"

"Didn't know as I did to any extent. If I did it was due to my own blindness and weakness for you. I don't want you to think this quarrel was anything of my choosing. It was begun before I was born; was in fact a part of my inheritance. The barrier has risen higher and grown deeper with each succeeding generation, until now there is no tearing it down."

"Did Carroll Southard ever wrong you, father?"

"Yes, from the very fact that he was Calvin Southard's son. My daughter, you are treading not only on forbidden but dangerous ground. Let this be the last time while I am living that his name or that of any of his kindred is

mentioned in this house. Until the dead can lift the veil of crime from the living can more than sorrow come from the mingling of Southard and Lancier in name or fortune, in thought or deed. But our breakfast is getting cold as well as our hearts. Let us eat in peace while we may. Heaven only knows how soon the hand of Jove may strike."

The morning meal was eaten in an unusual silence. Major Lancier, commonly so full of boisterous life, relapsed into a quiet bordering upon moroseness. Robert said nothing, though Aurian did not fail to notice that ever and anon he cast furtive glances toward her father. And she fell to wondering if he was really drifting away from the time-honored beliefs of the South.

"I suppose preparations have been made for the funeral of Uncle Frost to-day," said Robert, when the breakfast had been finished. "If you think best, major, I will speak to the overseer in regard to allowing the negroes the privilege of attending in a body."

"Do so by all means, Robert. I think I will ride down to Sharpsburg this forenoon. Order Sam Patch to saddle Oak as soon as he can, Mrs. Ralston."

Aurian, lending her assistance toward preparing for the funeral, found little spare time at her command. She heard nothing during the day concerning Carroll Southard nor did she meet Esten Berners, who had not been seen at his home since early morning. What had called him away was unknown, though it was not unusual for him to be absent in that manner. Uncle Frost had been borne to his last resting-place and Aurian had left the disconsolate Aunt Debby for a walk down to the guardian beeches at the gate, when the shuffling step of S'posen Jones arrested her attention. Seesawing his body and gesticulating in a most grotesque way, he approached with apparent reluctance, saying:

"I s'pec's missus is drefful cut up 'bout de doin's ob dis

po' nigger, but I hope yo'll forgib him fo' whut he couldn't hel'."

"What do you mean, S'posen Jones? What has happened now?"

"Luddy! is't possible she has cl'an fergit by dis time," he said aside. "Wharfo' didn't I know jess erbout 'nough to hol' my brack mouf?" Then, to Aurian, he continued: "I hope to die, Missus Orry, if I c'u'd hel' yit. He jess made me lead dat dar hoss right off fro de wilderness, an' he nebber let him nor me res' all de night, till I git him 'way ober in de free States. He seems berry much glad den, an' I jess rid like de win' fo' Sylvany. Yo' berry mad, missus?"

"I should think I had reason to be," replied Aurian, knowing it would not do for her to let the negro understand that she was nearly overjoyed with his success. "But I won't say any more about it on the condition that you never speak of it again to me or any one else."

"Can't I tell dat ha'nt story ennymo'?" he asked, with a crestfallen countenance..

"I don't care how much you tell that, only look out and tell it the same every time."

"Golly! hain't I tol' yit de same fo' ebery single time? How I pull de wool ober dem nigs' eyes! Golly! I'se jess fot ob sum'fin' same's I hain't tol' yit. I'se goin' to gib yit to dem brack coons afore I fergits yit. T'ank yo', missus, I'se gone suah," and with his usual shuffling anā ducking he shambled toward the smokelhouse, the words coming back to her as he departed, "Cracky! I'se reckon dis darky's cuteness jess pulled de wool ober her eyes."

Aunt Debby in her loneliness felt a strong desire to pay a visit to her former home, and bring away such things of hers, prized on account of their associations rather than their real value, as could be found after the disastrous adventure of that stormy night. Aurian was nothing loath to arrange a trip to the deserted homestead, promising to

accompany the party herself. Aunt Debby was accordingly rendered immeasurably happy, scrambling about to get everything in readiness with a celerity quite amusing to the beholder. As it was too far for her to walk, and it was equally as preposterous to think of getting her to ride horseback, a cart was selected for the service, and the first Aurian knew, the childlike old negress was loading it with such a display of cakes, nuts, ham, eggs and other edibles as would have warranted any one in believing that a camping party was about starting on a month's outing.

"Why, aunty! what in the world are you doing with so much food?"

"Oh, Missus Orry, yit am such a big way an' we s'all be gone so long I fot yit w'u'd be drefful fine to hab a lunch dar. Den yit w'u'd seem so homelike to hab one mo' meal in de ol' home. I hopes I hain't mitted enny 'fense, honey.

"None whatever, aunty; carry just as much and whatever you wish," replied Aurian, who could not think of refusing her so simple a request.

The sun had passed the meridian an hour or more before the little party, with all the bustle of getting in readiness to start, was finally moving moderately down the Graymont road, which wound a zigzag course through the mountainous district lying to the southeast of Sylvania. It was necessary to take this way, though it came out upon the Wind River route a mile beyond their destination, and made an extra drive of at least three miles, for the reason that the bridge across the aforementioned stream had not as yet been replaced by a new one. However, the day was pleasant and this longer route would add to rather than detract from the pleasure of the expedition.

In the cart with Aunt Debby rode Furah and two others whom the first had invited on this "mem'able" trip. A hulking negro called New Orl'ins drove the team, which consisted of a pair of work-horses. In advance, as a sort of

vanguard, Aurian rode on her favorite horse Maze, attended by S'posen Jones. At least she was supposed to be favored with his attendance, but between his desire to be near his sable sweetheart and his pretense to duty, as his mistress was not willing to go at the slow pace of the team, it was never certain to count upon him at either particular place, but more likely to find him somewhere between these objective points, with a decided nearness to the last.

But this fact gave Aurian no concern. In truth it afforded her greater pleasure to be alone in her existing state of mind. The clear, crisp air gave new vigor to her thoughts, as she rode along the unpeopled road, often leading for long distances through the arcades of the forest, with the tall, straight trunks of the pines forming the columns and the dark-green foliage the arches of the primeval galleries. The dismal croaking of a crow perched on a crag in the distance fell with a softened cadence on the stillness of the autumn day, while a gay songster, concealed somewhere in the matted crest of a neighboring oak, thrilled all Nature with his melody. Looking up from those dim aisles through the ragged rents in the tree tops, the September sky seemed to have taken on the hues of the wildwood, the deep-tinted azure of space reflecting the alternating shades of green of the pines, the russet and brown of oak, maple and beech, while farther away toward the westering sun lay in bright bars the silver of the birch and poplar.

Though called the Graymont road, this way really left that notable estate half a mile off to the right in going toward the south, the old building looming up on the summit of an eminence of land that commanded a wide view of the surrounding country like some castle in ancient story. Even at that distance it showed its neglect and long desuetude. Aurian resolved to ride up to the old homestead on her return home, as she had not been nearer than she was then to the buildings for a long time.

At the forks of the Graymont and Wind River roads stood another relic of better days, the deserted house of an aged couple who had died several years since, leaving no heir to inherit their humble home. Finding that she had quite ridden out of sight of her companions, Aurian stopped for them to come along, when the party kept on together to that spot hallowed with the most sacred recollections of Aunt Debby's years of freedom, though she was wont to say "dat de happies' days ob me life wuz wiv Massa Southard at Graymont."

The old place looked desolate enough now, and as Aurian saw the awful work of that stormy night, and realized as she had not been able to before how near they had been to being washed away, she could not repress a shudder. The things had not been disturbed in the house, but good old Aunt Debby didn't feel like spreading the board as she had expected, and as she looked about the hallowed scene she could do but little save to sob and cry like a child.

"Yit'll nebber, nebber be ag'in whut yit wuz afore. All dem bright days is gone. Dar's whar Frostus—po' ol' soul—used to set an' smoke, an' smoke, till yit did seem he'd smoke de las' breff ob life away. Now he's gone! Yo' mus' s'cuse an ol' woman's tears, honey. I'll hel' right erway to pile de t'ings inter de cart. Mebbe we'd bestes' let de lunch be till we git home, fo' we shall be proper hungry den, chil'un."

Aunt Debby's word was law that day, and even S'posen Jones obeyed her orders to the very letter. Some time before sunset everything was packed into the cart, and they were ready to start on their homeward journey. Aurian, remembering her determination to ride up to Graymont, when she had seen that everything was in proper shape for the return, told the others to come along as fast as they could, while she would be waiting for them at the Graymont crossroad.

Like all horses, Maze felt encouraged to find himself

headed toward home and he fairly flew up the gradual ascent reaching to the deserted house already mentioned. Merely glancing in that direction, as she dashed past, Aurian nevertheless thought she caught sight of a face at one of the broken windows, when she checked her horse's gait long enough to get a clearer view of the place. The countenance had disappeared, but she was so certain that she had heard some one move, she guided Maze up to the doorway. From her elevated position she could easily look into the window, when a sharp cry left her lips at the sight of him whom she beheld

“Why, Carroll Southard, can this be you?”

He arose to his feet with great difficulty, and came to the door, leaning heavily the while against the wall.

“It is I, Aurian; but I did not dream of seeing you here.”

“You are ill,” she cried, noticing the pallor of his countenance, and the sharp lines drawn about his mouth like one who is suffering great agony. “What has happened?”

“It is the same old trouble; they are hunting me down like a dog for giving aid to that poor slave. I have been driven from Graymont, but I have been wounded and can go no further. But you are running great risk in remaining in this locality. If they should find you here with me it might fare ill with you. Ride on while you may unharmed.”

“But I am not so devoid of humanity as to desert a friend in need of my aid.”

“Alas! it would only jeopardize your own safety without really helping me. They are crazy for my capture. I would surrender, for in the sight of heaven I do not believe I have committed any wrong, but in their excited state I could not hope for other than the most desperate treatment. Nothing short of my death would satisfy them. I can but sell my life as dearly as possible.”

“That must not be; you must get away—somehow.”

"I have gone as far as I can. My wound will not let—look yonder! unless my eyes deceive me there they come. Flee, Aurian! flee, ere it is too late. I appreciate your sympathy and it gives me courage to die. Don't risk your precious life needlessly."

Aurian saw plainly a body of horsemen coming over the crest of a distant hill, and from the flying pace they were pursuing she knew they must soon reach them. In her heart she did not believe the hunted man merited such treatment as he was sure to receive at the hands of that wild mob. But what could she do to save him. His only hope lay in flight, and with this idea in her mind came the thought of Maze. On his back might he not escape? No sooner had she come to this conclusion than she sprang to the ground, crying:

"Take my horse and flee for your life! He is fresh and fleet; with him you may yet escape."

"But think of the consequences to you! No—no! I could not accept life on such conditions. Again I implore of you to flee—"

She stopped him with a wave of her hand. The pursuing horsemen had disappeared from the distant summit, but the clatter of their horses' hoofs could be heard with a startling distinctness.

"Quick, Mr. Southard! into the saddle. Maze is the fleetest horse in this vicinity, except father's Oak. Do not spare him, and I believe you will yet escape. Never fear for me; I will look out for myself."

It was a critical moment in the life of Carroll Southard. He knew to refuse Aurian Lancier's proffered assistance meant death to him, and like a drowning man catching at a straw he hobbled to the side of the waiting Maze. With her help he gained the saddle.

"I wish it was different," she said. "But you must make it do. God grant that you will escape. Ride! do not delay longer," and with her own hand she dealt Maze

a ringing blow, when the faithful steed leaped forward at a swift gait.

“May heaven reward you, the noblest of women, if I never can,” were his last words. The next moment, as he disappeared around a turn in the road on the way to the south, his pursuers galloped into sight in the opposite direction.

CHAPTER XII.

BETWEEN TWO PERILS.

FORTUNATELY for Aurian she had the presence of mind to retreat into the old house before the approaching horsemen had seen her, and she saw them dash past at breakneck speed. The leader shouted out some command, which she failed to catch, though she felt certain by his gestures that he had discovered the fugitive ahead.

"I pray he may escape," she exclaimed involuntarily, as she saw them disappear where a minute before Carroll Southard's white face had vanished from her gaze. "Maze can outdistance them all I am sure if nothing happens to prevent his flight. But here comes Aunt Debby and her companions. Now I wonder how I shall explain the loss of my horse to them? I don't like this quibbling, but I have got to make some satisfactory explanation without letting them know what I have done. I wonder how this will end? Aunt Debby, I am in a pretty plight. Maze has left me!"

"'Fore de Lord, Missus Orry, whut hab happened? Air yo' hurted, honey?"

"Not a bit, aunty. But I thought I would stop a moment at this old house, and I left Maze in the yard. When I came out he was gone. I suppose he would naturally go directly home, though I never knew him to run away from me."

The surprise of the negroes was unbounded, but all agreed with their mistress that the runaway horse had gone home, and that it would be useless to look elsewhere for

him. Accordingly she rode in the cart with Aunt Debby, looking anxiously forward to her arrival at home. Of course Maze had not put in an appearance there, and the account of his mysterious disappearance was the wonder of the hour. In order to keep up the show of anxiety she should naturally have, Aurian caused S'posen Jones and two other negroes to search for the missing horse. She sought the seclusion of her room as soon as possible, where she tried to anticipate the most reasonable outcome of the affair. Would Carroll Southard succeed in eluding his enemies? Had she done right in assisting him? What would her father say if he should in any way learn the truth?

These questions were as far from an answer in her mind as ever, when her parent returned from a Sharpsburg visit, Robert came in from one of his fox hunts, and S'posen Jones and his companions reappeared upon the scene, announcing in their boisterous manner their inability to find Maze.

This was Major Lancier's first intimation of what had occurred, and he impatiently called Aurian to explain what it all meant, when she retold her story substantially as she had given it at the first. Without seeming to dream of any deception, the major exclaimed :

"Well, I don't see any need of all this fuss and feathers. I supposed by all this outcry that you had been thrown and half killed, as I have no doubt you will be some day. I am not certain but it will be for the best if the horse never comes back."

It was evident that Major Lancier was in one of his worst moods. Politics had not gone to his liking that day, and if there is anything in this life to unseat a man's peace of mind it is that troublesome factor. Aurian was thankful for once that he was not in a frame of mind to pursue the subject further, though she did not fail to notice that Robert, who was present, bore a look upon his countenance she could not understand. He offered no comment

then, but when he had the opportunity to speak to her alone, he said :

“Beware, sis ; you are on dangerous ground.”

“What do you mean?”

“Nothing to your harm, sis. You did that well, but I would warn you against——”

“Robert, will you please explain?” she asked, trembling with excitement.

“I am sorry that I spoke ; but now I have I might as well make a clean showing. I know what has become of Maze, and Carroll Southard may thank his lucky stars for what you did. But I should never have dreamed it of you.”

Her whole form quivered with emotion. Clutching him by the arm, she demanded :

“Do you intend to betray me, Robert?”

“Not I, my dear Aurian. I hope the affair will give you no further trouble. I wish it had been some other man than Carroll Southard. I have no friendship for him, but for your sake I hope he will get away. It might go hard with you if he should be captured with Maze and the horse recognized as belonging to you. But we won’t look on the dark side. When I saw him he was riding for all the horse was worth, and I never dreamed the creature could go so.”

“I don’t know as I did right, Robert ; but he was wounded and they would have killed him if they had got him. Do you think he will escape?”

“Doubtful, Aurian. But don’t let that trouble you. I have an idea he would go through Weymouth, and I think I will ride over that way to-morrow, and see if I can hear anything of him.”

“You might run across Maze, and if you did you could bring him back. You are very kind, dear brother, and I thank you for it.”

The next morning Robert was as good as his word, but the forenoon passed without seeing his return, or bringing

any tidings of Maze. Her father began to show concern in regard to the missing horse, and in the middle of the afternoon he ordered Oak to be saddled, when accompanied by Sam Patch he rode away toward Sharpsburg. He had not been gone more than three-fourths of an hour before a riderless horse was seen coming up the road at a wild gallop.

“It’s Maze!” cried Mrs. Ralston, while Aurian started wildly toward the gate. But as she came in sight of the road the approaching animal rushed between the beeches and into the yard, its sides flecked with dust and foam, its head and tail in the air, while it snorted as only a runaway does.

Aurian saw at a glance that it was not Maze, and a cry of anguish left her lips as she reeled backward crying:

“It is Oak! What has happened to father? Perhaps he has been killed!”

The horse had gone directly to the stable, while every one in the manor rushed out in wild excitement.

“Put the saddle on Maze, S’posen—no, Maze isn’t here. Saddle Brownie as quick as ever you can, and I will ride and see what has befallen father.”

“Robert took Brownie, missus,” replied S’posen, “‘cos he’s lent his hoss. And Blackbird is dead lame, and Ringfoot hab no shoe on de off fore foot. Suah’s yo’ bo’n, Missus Orry, dar ain’t a hoss in de stable fit to trabble, ‘less yo’ take Brack Gyp.”

“I want you to come with me on him. If there is no other horse put the saddle on Oak. He is not so winded but he will be good the distance I shall have to go.”

Upon hearing this order her hearers held up their hands in horror.

“Ride wild Oak, Orry!” exclaimed Mrs. Ralston. “Don’t you dare to think of that. Your father is the only person who has ever dared to ride him, not excepting Robert. He will kill you and then——”

"Stop, Mrs. Ralston! Every moment may mean life or death to poor father. I am not afraid to ride Oak—I will risk but I can manage him. Get my old saddle—quick, S'posen."

Muttering over something the rest could not hear, the negro ducked his head and shambled after the saddle. The aroused horse, with a terrific snort, plunged furiously around the grounds.

"See him!" cried the frightened housekeeper. "Don't go near him! He will kill somebody! Stop, Orry! don't go near him. Oh! this is terrible!" and the terrified woman buried her face in her hands, unable to look upon her young mistress who was boldly advancing toward the maddened horse.

"Whoa, Oak!" called out Aurian, and as the animal finished the circuit of the yard and dashed near to her, she caught upon the dangling rein and brought him to a standstill, when he stood trembling in every limb. S'posen Jones' teeth were chattering as he approached with the saddle.

"I darsn't, missus; 'deed I darsn't. Let New Orl'ins hel' yo' do yit. He taller den I am. 'Deed I ain't tall 'nough."

"S'posen Jones, bring along that saddle. New Orl'ins, pull off that other one. I will hold him so he shan't hurt either of you."

"I ain't 'fraid, missus," said S'posen, between his chattering teeth. "But I ain't tall 'nuff; 'deed I ain't."

Under her directions the frightened twain succeeded in shifting the saddles, and seeing that the girth was secure, she led the restive steed to the block, and the next moment she was on wild Oak's back!

Just then Sam Patch, whom all had forgotten, rode furiously upon the scene, his long arms sawing the air, while his ebony features looked yellow with terror. He seemed to have lost his speech, for Aurian had to ask of her

father three times before the overwrought darky could exclaim :

“Massa Lancier’s kilt an’ burnt up at de ol’ Granary!”

Unable to get more tangible information from the negro than that her father had met with some mishap at the old mill on the Lash, and that the ruins were on fire, she gave the restive horse his bit, when she was borne down the path at a rate of speed which brought exclamations and cries of horror from the spectators.

“She will be killed sure!” cried Mrs. Ralston. “S’posen Jones, take Black Gyp and follow her if you value your life.”

“Yes, missus; I’se off like de win’.”

Aurian had only got fairly started down the turnpike, when she met Esten Berners, who had been startled by the appearance of the runaway horse and was on his way to Sylvania to find out what had happened. Checking the headlong gait of Oak, somewhat, she shouted in answer to his inquiring look :

“Father has met with an accident at the old Granary—mill on fire.”

Without stopping for his reply she dashed madly down the road, Black Oak seeming to be invested with unusual speed. Daniel Berners turned from the gang of slaves he was watching to look after her, and then rushed to the manor. But unmindful of the looks her wild riding was calling upon herself, Aurian gave Oak a free rein, until the path leading to the old mill was reached, when she was obliged to hold in the flying steed somewhat.

Along this pathway overhung with bushes it was impossible to keep up the rate of speed she had followed so far. But the sight of a dense cloud of smoke rising above the tree tops in the distance caused her to pay little heed to the tangled growth that dealt her cruel blows as she sped on. Oak maddened by these attacks of the bushes, reared and plunged furiously. Still his rider urged him on regardless

of the consequences to herself. Huge rents were torn in her dress, and her hands and face were cut and scratched in several places. Hark! the roar of the flames rang in her ears and the fire could be plainly seen! The next moment the horse broke through the growth into the little clearing in front of the ruins, when a sight met Aurian's gaze that brought a wild appeal to her father from her lips. But the crackling and seething of the fire was the only reply.

The whole northern portion of the mill was on fire, and it was rapidly advancing toward the other end. Leaping to the ground she ran down as near as she could to the fire, leaving Oak to shift for himself. After calling her father's name several times without getting a reply, she crept still nearer, the flames flinging their fiery tongues into her face. At last she reached a place where she could look down upon a corner of the floor, toward which the fire was then fast eating its way. She had given the place but a second glance, when a cry of horror escaped her lips.

Lying prone upon the floor so near that the flames had already blistered his skin, was the unconscious figure of her father!

How she gained the place she never could clearly tell, but in a moment she was bending over his unconscious figure, and crying aloud to him in agony. A pool of blood had formed near his head, which bore an ugly gash. Even in her excitement she realized that it was impossible for them to remain there another minute. She believed he was living, but what could she do to save him? It was six or eight feet to the top of the wall, so that she could not think of raising him to that height. Seeing that an opening was on the opposite side, she caught hold of him and dragged him in that direction, soon getting beyond the fiercest of the heat. But the respite could be only temporary, for when she had gone as far as she could, to a position at the extreme end where the river dashed furiously over the rocks fifteen feet below, she was not far removed from the flames which were continuing to advance as fast as ever.

There was no going any further; there was no retreating. The fragment of boarding upon which she stood and her father lay was not over four feet in width. The only thing in her favor was the wind. That was beating the smoke and flames the other way, but in defiance of this the conflagration was steadily advancing. At that moment one side of the building fell in with a loud crash, sending into the air a cloud of sparks and cinders, while the flames roared and crackled louder than ever. Exhausted from her efforts in getting her father to even that point of temporary safety, and knowing in a moment they must perish, she felt a thrill of joy at the sound of a friendly voice, and looking across the yawning gulf of foaming waters she saw Esten Berners. He had followed her upon Black Gyp, and as she saw him he shouted so as to be heard above the roar of fire and river:

“Have courage and I will soon have you safe.”

Seeing there was no other way of reaching the spot, he looked about until he had found a small timber long enough to reach from the bank of the stream to the remnant of floor. Pushing this out over the chasm with considerable difficulty, he finally had a bridge by which he could pass over to the place.

“I shall have to carry your father over first, after which I will return for you. Have no fear but I will be in season. Ah! he is recovering his senses.”

Major Lancier had begun to move, and at that moment he opened his eyes and looked vaguely around.

“You will soon be safe, father,” said Aurian. “Do not be alarmed.”

“Where am I? and where is that fire? Oh, dear! the old mill is burning up!”

“Do you think you can stand?” asked Esten, lifting him up to a sitting posture. “Lean on me all you want to. We can’t stay here much longer.” The fire was eating closely down upon them, and what was worst the wind had

changed so the flames and smoke were driven into their faces. It was a herculean task that Esten Berners had to perform, but for the time he seemed invested with two men's strength. With his right arm about the trembling figure of Major Lancier, he steadied the other so he was enabled to cross over the narrow bridge, which trembled and cracked beneath their weight. He had requested Aurian to remain on the flooring until he could return to assist her over the chasm.

Then as soon as Esten had placed her father beyond further harm from the fire, he hastened back to her rescue. But as he sped across the gap the rotten timber broke so nearly off that he had to catch upon it to save it from falling into the depths. At the same moment he felt the support under them falling away!

Then, pulling the timber along so as to bring a bearing beyond the broken part, he was dismayed to find it too short to span the distance. Another crash below them told that the whole affair was rapidly breaking down.

"You must cross over as quickly as you can, Aurian. I will hold this end in my hands, if you think you can walk safely over. Have good courage and do not look down. Quick, if you value your life."

He had dropped upon his hands and knees on the very edge of the narrow platform, and was holding in his hands the end of the timber so it still stretched across the abyss. She realized that it was a dizzy passage for her to make, and that he was staking his own life on her escape. But it was folly for her to remonstrate. She hoped for the best, and with a calmness she could not comprehend afterward she stepped boldly upon the slim bridge, and her weight was added to the burden on her deliverer's arms.

"Never fear but I can hold you," he said. "Step quickly and you will pass safely over."

With his encouraging words she ran lightly the length of the timber, but not an instant too soon. Her foot had

barely touched the ground, when a terrific crash and a furious hissing and crackling of the flames rang in her ears. She turned scarcely in season to see the entire remnant of the old mill collapse and fall in a smouldering heap. In the midst of that terrible debris she saw Esten Berners for one moment, then he disappeared from sight, carried down into the vortex of fire and water!

CHAPTER XIII.

THE RETURN OF MAZE.

AURIAN LANCIER uttered a cry of dismay as she beheld the fate of Esten Berners, and fearing that she would commit some rash act in her excitement her father caught hold of her, saying :

“Be calm, Aurian. He may escape yet. He was out over the water, so he will escape the fire. Look! isn’t that his head just above that mass of burnt wood?”

She had already caught sight of the object pointed out by her father, and she was soon able to distinguish the figure of a man in the midst of a collection of cinders and burnt wood tossed on the surface of the swirling waters.

“He doesn’t seem to be making any effort to save himself, father. He has been hurt! He is tossed helplessly in the river! He will be drowned, if he is not dead already, unless something is done to save him.”

“Too true, my daughter; but if a hundred men were drowning there I could not save one of them, in my present condition. I am sorry for the boy. Hark! I thought I heard a horseman coming.”

Aurian had not stopped to hear him finish his speech, but catching up a short pole lying near by, she ran down to the edge of the high bank, where she could see the doomed man plainer than before. He was being still borne on at the mercy of the stream. Even could she have reached him with the pole in her hand, it would have been of no avail, as he showed no signs of life.

Seeing that his body was being carried swiftly down the stream and that she was helpless to aid him where she was, Aurian looked hurriedly around for some means or some way to reach him. In this rapid survey she saw a spot a short distance below where the river narrowed in width, the place reached by an arm of rock. Thinking only of reaching the spot in season to catch hold of the victim of the flood, she ran along the bank a short distance, when she leaped recklessly down the precipitous descent, reaching the point of ledge barely in season to see Esten Berners' white face appear almost at her feet. Clutching upon his clothes with all the power she could concentrate, as he was being carried past, she pulled him from the water upon the rock, so only his feet lay in the stream. Then, overcome by her ordeal, she sank beside his dripping figure almost as helpless as he.

She had a dim consciousness of hearing a shout from the river bank, and a few minutes later strong arms raised her up, and she was lifted to her feet and assisted to the ground above. The new arrivals were Daniel Berners and a party from Sylvania, the first giving his attention to his unconscious son.

It was a long time that they had to work over Esten Berners before he showed any signs of life. A doctor had arrived, and a wagon and team sent down from Sylvania to get him home. He had either received a blow from one of the falling timbers, or what seemed more reasonable, struck his head on a rock when he had been precipitated into the Lash. At any rate, the cause was not now of so much account as the effect, which promised to prove serious.

By the time they had got home Aurian declared that she was fully recovered from the result of what she had been through. Her father, however, while he had received no permanent injury would be confined to his couch for a day or two.



She caught hold of him and dragged him to the opening.—See page 105.

Although no lucid account of the mishap at the old Granary could be given, it seemed that Major Lancier, prompted by some desire he was not inclined to acknowledge, had ridden down to the ruins accompanied by Sam Patch, and that while the latter was left to shift for himself, he had ridden down the bank of the stream, until he had been recalled by a cry of "fire" from the negro. How that fire started will always remain a mystery, for Sam Patch told so many stories to account for its origin that it was impossible to know which to believe. But it seemed most likely that he had accidentally lighted it from his pipe, and it had quickly spread until reaching the mill. At any rate it had gained good progress by the time Major Lancier dashed upon the scene. Oak, frightened by the flames, reared and plunged furiously, backed madly down the declivity on the west side of the old building, until he had unseated his rider, sending him headforemost into the basement. Stunned by the blow he lay there until the arrival of Aurian, barely in season to save him from the fire. Upon freeing himself of his master, the horse had started homeward at the top of his speed. Instead of rescuing the major, as he might have done without danger to himself at that time, the frightened Sam Patch followed after the runaway Oak.

The excitement naturally arising from this adventure drove all thoughts of the missing Maze from their minds, if Aurian is excepted. She looked anxiously for the return of Robert, who came about dark, with the intelligence that he communicated to her alone that he had not been able to learn anything of Southard more than the meager fact of silence over his fate.

"Poor Maze!" said Aurian, "I do not suppose I shall ever see him again. How true seems the old saying, 'It never rains but it pours.' Everything seems to be taking place at once. I must run down and see how Mr. Berners is getting along."

She found the latter better than she had expected, though he complained of a severe pain in his head.

"You must keep quiet," she said, "and you will speedily recover. I am going to delegate myself your nurse."

"Then I know I shall soon get well," he replied, with a faint smile. "Aurian, I am almost glad it all happened."

"Why, Esten Berners! you cannot realize how near you came to losing your life. I cannot help shuddering now as I recall that startling situation, and I see you falling in that burning mass."

"Then my death would have brought you some regret."

"I cannot forget, were I so ungrateful as to desire it, that it was for my sake you incurred that awful risk. If you had not recrossed to help me you would have been——"

"Aurian, do you think me so heartless as to have been able to see you perish before my eyes without lifting a hand to save you? But it was you who saved my life after all, and it is I who am the debtor and not you."

"If I am going to be your nurse I shall have to forbid you talking so much; at least, until you are stronger."

"It shall be as you say, only remember you are to be my nurse. I ask for no greater favor."

He soon fell into a peaceful slumber, when Aurian returned to her home, finding that her father was resting comfortable.

"With two patients on my hands, I think I have about as much as I can attend to for the present."

The following morning Aurian was aroused by a furious thumping on her door and the voice of Mrs. Ralston, saying:

"Do get right up quick, Miss Orry! You can't think what has happened." Then, before her half-frightened mistress could speak, the excited housekeeper added: "*Maze has come home!*"

Scarcely able to comprehend the good news, Aurian waited to hear no more, but performed her toilet without stopping to call the sleepy Furah.

"Where is he, Mrs. Ralston? And how did he come?"

"I don't know, Orry, but he was standing at the stable door when I got up. Your saddle is on just as you had it, but the poor creature looks as if he had been driven about to death."

Stopping to hear no more Aurian ran out of the manor, to be met midway in the yard by the horse, which gave a whinny of delight at sight of her. His appearance showed that he had come far and fast, but unmindful of his streaming coat she threw her arms about his neck, exclaiming:

"You dear, noble creature! where have you been? Are you glad to see your mistress once more, old fellow?" In a lower tone she asked: "Did he not send any message by you? How I wish you had a tongue so you could tell me all."

The intelligent animal gave another whinny in that soft, winning way belonging only to that noblest of quadrupeds, and bending low his head rubbed its top against her. It may have been that the leather chafed him; it may be that he knew the treasure concealed there. Who can tell?

"Does the old bridle hurt you?" asked Aurian, unfastening the strap and pulling off the headpiece, when she saw a tiny strip of paper fastened on the inner side. With feverish anxiety she read the single word, "saved."

"Oh, you darling old Maze, you deserve to live without work all the rest of your precious life. I could eat you up, I am so glad to see you again. But you must be hungry, and you shall have the best in the stable. Mrs. Ralston, call that lazy S'posen, and send him here at once."

S'posen Jones, for once being promptly on hand, led Maze away to the stable, muttering to himself:

"Yit's monstrous cur'us, but I s'pec's I lak to see de truf ob dis mattah! I'se a cute one, missus! But Lor' sakes! I nebber—haw! haw! haw!"

The return of Maze was the cause of much talk, and many conjectures were made by one and another, Major Lancier saying the least of any person at Sylvania, excepting Robert who immediately prepared for a day's fox hunt.

Finding her father was nearly recovered from his injury Aurian sought her other "patient" as soon as she could. She found him about the same as the evening before, though at sight of her his countenance brightened.

"I have been anxiously waiting for you," he said. "It is so dark and cheerless when you are not here."

"You don't want to get into that state of mind, Mr. Berners. The first medicine I shall prescribe for you is cheerfulness, and I shall insist upon having you take it whether I am here or not."

"It will be very easy to take when you are here, but the sunlight goes with you."

"Stop, Mr. Berners! you and I must have an understanding at the outset, if you want me for your nurse. Are you willing to agree to any reasonable proposition?"

"To anything that you say, Aurian."

"There you are again! Mr. Berners, if you wish for my poor company you must promise not to talk in that way at all. Nor ever refer to the subject you discussed the day I was on my visit to Uncle Frost's. Do you promise this?"

"Never—never tell you that I——"

"Hush! I do not want you to say that. And unless you pledge yourself never to mention the matter, until I give you permission, I shall feel obliged to stay away from you. Will you promise, Mr. Berners?"

His gaze had been fixed closely upon her while she was speaking, and as she finished he continued to look at her, as if he would read her inmost thoughts. At that moment spirit seemed to speak to spirit.

"'Until I give you permission,'" he repeated.

"Will that time and opportunity ever come?"

"Whether it will or not I must insist upon my request. I can come and see you under no other condition, though I do not forget that I owe you a debt I can pay in no other way. Mr. Berners, you must throw off the lethargy that holds you down. Rise above this dream-life holding you to the unreal and impractical. Assert your manhood so as to rise over all disappointment. Now I have preached you my little sermon, are you prepared to give your promise?"

He hesitated but a moment, when he replied in a firm tone:

"I am, on one condition."

"And that?"

"Is that I may call you by your given name, and that you will favor me in the same way. Is this asking too much of one I have known all of my life?"

"No. Now we have come to such a good understanding, I know we shall get along famously. First of all I want to tell you a bit of news. Maze returned to Sylvania this morning."

"Do you hail that as good news or bad?" he asked.

"As good news, of course, for I prize Maze very highly."

He made no reply to this, but she could not help wondering to herself what was in his mind. She did not dare to continue the subject, and it was never broached by either of them again.

Esten Berners had a run of slow fever, hastened no doubt by his adventure at the Lash, but the doctor declared it had been lurking in his system for a long time. It was fortunate for him that Aurian favored him with so much of her company, or the days must have passed tediously to him. The housekeeper was a colored woman but with none of the warm-hearted characteristics of her race, and the sick man would have suffered sadly for good care. Perhaps his father had all he could attend to about his work. Be that as it may, he merely troubled himself to ask daily if it was not about time for him to get out of

doors. Aurian's dislike for the overseer was stronger than it had ever been before. Under these circumstances it was scarcely more than might have been expected that she did all in her power for him who had saved her life twice within a month.

Her father had recovered in a few days, and he was more devoted to political matters than ever, while Robert, strange to say, seemed to think of nothing but the fox chase.

"I want you to go to Annapolis with me to-day, Robert. They are pushing us hard to the wall. I wish you had the ambition to make a few speeches."

"To show you that it takes something more than ambition to deliver a speech, eh? What is the use of all this fuss and feathers, as you say, major? As for me I had rather have one sleek fox than all the oily politicians in old Maryland."

This indifference of Robert was a greater annoyance than he cared to own, and in his disappointment he appealed to Aurian with his fears for the future.

"Isn't it right for the majority to rule, father? And if the majority of the people of Maryland believe that the North is right why should you——"

He stopped her with an impatient gesture, saying:

"Zounds, girl! what is that you are saying? The majority! The majority makes the rabble, and the rabble is always wrong. Is it possible I have a traitor in my own household?"

"I do not know what you mean, father. I do not intend to be untrue to you. As to politics, I say only what my reason in its innocence dictates. I certainly hope the right will prevail."

"It is might and not right against us, my child. The North is jealous of our growing power. It looks with envy on our teeming fields of rice and cotton, our rich crops of sugar and tobacco, and it says: 'Behold the fruits of slave

labor! Let us take from them their slaves, and we have no more to fear in the great industrial competition.' They mean to do it, and with the way they have arranged it we have got to look sharp or they will. The vote of a pauper there is enough to tie the ballot of the richest slaveholder in the South. In the election of Lincoln the North has nothing at stake to lose, the South everything. But I do not wish to embitter your life, my daughter. A man's home should come before his country, for 'the strength of a nation lies in its homes.' I am afraid my anxiety over political matters has robbed you of that solicitude rightfully yours. You are too noble a representative of the Lancier and the Aurian to be unfaithful to the house of Sylvania."

"I trust, father, I am a true daughter of Maryland," she replied, laying her hand in his, while he stooped and kissed her. "I am afraid you are letting these gloomy thoughts trouble you too much. I do not like to see those lines of care coming so rapidly into your countenance."

"Perhaps I am puzzling my old head more than I ought to with affairs that really concern the next generation more than mine. If so, it is because in my wisdom of years I see what they fail to discern. Now that careless Robert gives more thought to a fox hunt than he does to a presidential election. There is not much Lancier to him, I am sorry to say. I am almost afraid to trust you and Sylvania to him; but it seems the inevitable course of nature. By the way, darling, I have been thinking that it might be best for you and he to have this matter between you two fixed up before the trouble comes on."

"The matter between us, father? I do not understand you.

"Has he said nothing to you of—of—demme, if I can say it!"

"What can you mean? Is there any message Robert—"

"Nothing, child, nothing! I believe I am growing

childish. But how is your patient down at the house?" he asked, to change the drift of the conversation.

"He is getting along finely, father, only he thinks too much of war. Only yesterday he asked me to read to him everything which had been done at Annapolis. Even in his sleep he talks of leading armies, and wakes in a high fever over the excitement of an imaginary battle."

"He has all the soldierly pride of a Lancier. I verily believe he will outstrip Robert in that direction, as he did in his studies."

"Do you really believe there is going to be a war, father?"

"Tut—tut, child! such grave matters should not bother your innocent head. There, I have some correspondence to look after, so you will have to excuse me until dinner."

Aurian was made extremely light-hearted during the following week by the cheerfulness of her father, who seemed suddenly to have thrown off the great burden which had been weighing on his mind. He was at home more than common, so that between enjoying his company and that of caring for her "patient" she found opportunity to take Maze from the stable but once. This was one Wednesday afternoon, when she took a canter as far as Lash bridge, and upon returning she ran down to pay Esten Berners a short call. This "call" really extended into a visit, for she found him uncommonly cheerful, there being no hint of the dark subject of war lying so near to the surface of his mind. She was really surprised to find that the mellow light of a full moon rising over the corrugated brow of South Mountain had succeeded the warmer glow of the sun when she started for home. But it was one of those rare evenings of the month of golden harvests, when the bright sky holds back the dark drapery of night as if the lingering glory of the dying day had suffused its azure brow for all time. Silhouetted against the silvery moonbeams the rugged old beeches formed fantastic figures,

each branch and leaf resting in undisturbed repose. The shrill, but musical, cry of a katydid was the first sound to break in upon the silence of the beautiful scene. The note of the arch-songster of the wildwood was followed a moment later by a sudden outburst of song from a throat decidedly human but with an unmistakable African melody. Then a whole chorus of voices filled the evening air with mirth if not with music.

"The negroes are starting up early," thought Aurian. "I had almost forgotten that they were planning a cake-walk to-night. What a careless set they are, and no matter how hard they have worked they seem always ready to engage in their childish sports. Who can that be dodging among those trees?"

This last was called forth by the appearance of a man's figure skulking through the growth to her right, and as she asked herself the question the individual suddenly dropped half out of sight on the ground. His appearance was so familiar to her that she called out:

"Is that you, S'posen Jones?"

"No, missus; dis ain't me!" was the tremulous reply.

"Why, S'posen Jones!" cried Aurian, not to be deceived by that thick, lisping tone, "what are you stealing off in that way for?"

"'Tain't me stealin' off in dis way, Missus Orry. Dis darky ain't me hidin'!"

"Well, no matter who you are, come down here."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE OLD GRAY COAT.

SLOWLY, in answer to Aurian's command, the slouching figure of S'posen Jones assumed an upright position, and as she repeated her request he started toward her. She did not fail to notice that since dropping to the earth he had divested himself of his coat! Unable to comprehend this singular action, she told him to bring the garment with him.

"I hain't got no coat on, missus," whined the negro.

"I know that, but there it is on the ground, where you put it."

Turning about and apparently seeing the article in question for the first time, he exclaimed :

"'Fore de Lord! ef dat ain't de mos' 'sterious t'ing I eber see! How do yo' s'pose dat coat come dar, Missus Orry?"

"We won't discuss that now; but bring it here."

"I hope you don't 'cuse me ob stealin', missus. On my sacred wo'd ob honor——"

Aurian snatched the garment from him so suddenly that S'posen ended his speech with a cry of terror. She was too much overcome to cry out. It was the old gray coat described by Uncle Frost as worn by the second duelist at that fatal meeting in the old Granary!

There was no mistaking the garment. The white buttons were still on it, and as Aurian held the coat up by the collar, she saw the "harrow-shaped" tear, though it had been mended by bungling hands. For a time she

could not command her emotions enough to ask of the negro :

“S’posen Jones, where did you get that coat?”

“I—I didn’t git dat coat, missus. Yit am de turrible truf, suah’s yo’ bo’n. I hope to drop dead ef——”

“Stop! I want none of your lies. I don’t care *how* you came by the coat, but I want to know where you got it. Will you tell me?”

“Fore de Lord, Missus Orry! if yo’ see me—S’posen Jones—wiv dat coat, I s’pose I hab to b’lieve yit. But I nebber b’lieve yit fro’ enny udder pusson in dis wo’ld. Dat big blubber, Sam Patch, mus’ put yit on me w’en I wuz sleep, an’ den I got up an’ jess walked off wiv yit on! Mighty queer dat t’ing happen in dat way.”

“S’posen Jones, you grow worse and worse. I won’t harm you if you will tell me the truth. I do not care *how* you got it, but you must tell me *where* you got it.”

The frightened fellow could only roll his eyes and clasp and unclasp his hands, until at last he blurted out:

“I hain’t a t’ief, missus.”

“I never thought you were, S’posen. Did Mrs. Ralston give this coat to you?”

In an instant his dark countenance lightened.

“Dat’s yit, missus, suah’s yo’ bo’n. Monstrous strange I didn’t t’ink ob dat ‘fore.”

“Come with me back to the manor, and we will speak to the housekeeper about this.”

“I s’pec’s, Missus Orry, yo’ will be berry sorry, but yo’ mus’ ’scuse me, as I’se in orful hurry ’bout dis time. Yo’ see de cake-walk——”

“You shall have time to go to that. Come with me now.”

Falling farther and farther behind her as they went along, S’posen reluctantly followed his mistress to the manor, where they met Mrs. Ralston at the door.

“Where did this coat come from, Mrs. Ralston?” asked

Aurian, holding the garment up so the housekeeper could see it.

"Why bless me, Orry! that is the old coat Furah found in the garret, and she asked me if S'posen couldn't wear it to the cake-walk to-night. I hope I haven't done anything wrong in letting him have it. I did not know the thing was in being until she ran across it in overhauling some old things. Did I do wrong?"

"Oh, no. But there is a coat of Robert's in his wardrobe—I mean the blue one—that will be better for S'posen to wear than this. See! this will hardly hold together, it is so old; S'posen, tell Furah to get the coat I have mentioned, and then you can go to the cake-walk."

Showing the relief he felt to escape thus easily by a broad grin and an overcommon ducking and swinging, S'posen left without delay.

Aurian tried to appear calm, but there was a tremor in her voice in spite of all as she asked of Mrs. Ralston:

"Whose coat is this?"

"Why bless me, child! how white you look. Are you sick?"

"No, Mrs. Ralston; but you have not answered my question. Who used to wear this coat?"

"Why your father, my dear. He used to wear it when I first came to Sylvania, and that was before you were born."

Aurian did not hear half that the other said, and everything seemed to float before her eyes.

"Didn't ever any one else wear it?"

"Not to my knowledge. At least never since the night he wore it when it got that ugly rent in its back. I don't know what happened that night, but he was out till nearly morning—yes, quite that, for I was up when he came in, looking as white as a ghost. When I asked him what the trouble was he didn't speak. But he took that coat off, and saying he had torn it, told me to burn it up. I know

I told him I could mend that place easy enough, but he declared he should never wear it again, because it was too tight. In my excitement I suppose I must have tossed it aside, and it got carried off with some other clothes. At any rate I have never seen it till—mercy me! are you going to faint? Let me get the salts."

"No—no! I am all right; at least I shall be in a minute. I am going to my room, and if any one asks for me tell them I have retired. I believe my head does ache."

Carrying the telltale coat with her, Aurian sought her apartment, though not to sleep or to rest. Every part of Uncle Frost's story lingered in her mind with a terrible meaning. Had this coat, which he had so faithfully described, been worn by her father on that fateful night? If so—

When she left her room the next morning, with a racking headache and showing by her haggard countenance the night's unrest, her father was waiting impatiently for her.

"Why how ghostly you are looking!" he said. "My faith! that makes me more determined than ever that you shall go. It will be the best thing for you, and if a winter in New England does not bring the roses back to your cheeks nothing will. There is no call for you to wear your life out for that good-for-nothing Berners."

"What was that you were saying about New England, father?" asked Aurian, ignoring his last statement.

"Why, I have just got a letter from Elias Northup at Machine Falls, Mass. You know he and I used to be so intimate we pledged ourselves never to be separated; then he got married and went back to New England, and I haven't heard from him for more than fifteen years. Singular how soon we forget the friends of our youth. It seems he has prospered; been a manufacturer; but his health has failed within a year or two. Wants me to come up and pay him a visit, and bring you along. You and his Ella must be the same age. Of course I can't think of going, but I can send you."

"Send me!" echoed Aurian, but when she and her father had talked the matter, pro and con, for an hour he was as firm in his intentions, while she had consented to make the visit. She had always felt a desire to travel, but she had never been outside of her native state. Thus, when she had fully decided to go to New England, she entered into the arrangements necessary for the journey with a keen zest. Happily, to a certain extent, it occupied her mind to the exclusion of the dark mystery of the gray coat. Though she wanted to speak to her father about it, she failed in the purpose, day by day, until her departure drew near.

Of all at Sylvania Esten Berners took the unexpected news of her prospective absence the most to heart. At first he would not believe it, but when she assured him it had been finally settled, he said:

"I shall miss you, Aurian, more than any one. You have been very kind to me, and you must not blame me for my weakness, as I cannot help feeling that this parting is forever."

"Nonsense, Mr. Berners! you are only relapsing into your old melancholy ways; and you know there is nothing I so dislike as a gloomy face and a mournful voice. I shall not be gone but a month, or two at the most, and when I come back you will be stronger and better for what you have suffered. To be frank with you, I would not go if I thought you really needed my care longer."

"I am very thankful to you, and those words give me joy. You call me melancholy, but with your help you shall never have reason to call me that again. Still I cannot stifle those mysterious warnings of the heart, which foretell the shades and sunshine, the storms and calms of life just as faithfully as the moan of the wind bears the message of the rain coming on its wings, or the lengthening shadows prophesy the approach of night. You are going among strangers, and will make new friends. You will let me hear from you occasionally, Aurian? And you

will take one little keepsake of mine with you? It belonged to my dear mother, who was taken from me ere I can remember her sweet face. It is a cameo pin with her name engraved on it. Will you wear this while you are gone?"

"Yes, as a token of remembrance of friend to friend. I hope you will soon be able to get out of doors. There—good-by."

"Seems to me it took you a long time to bid that shiftless fellow good-by," said her father, when she returned to the manor. "Robert wants to speak to you, and he has been waiting in the parlor this half-hour. Remember, my daughter and listen kindly to whatever he has to say. The boy may have his shortcomings, but he's—he's—he's a good fox hunter anyway. And Sylvania will not be—demme, where did you get that trinket?"

Without realizing fully what she was doing, Aurian had begun to fasten the pin given her by Esten Berners to her collar. Shrinking back with alarm before her father's fierce looks, she tried to get it out of his sight before he demanded:

"Let me see it."

Then, as he took it from Aurian's trembling hand, he said more to himself than to her: "It was hers. Where has it been all these years?" While he turned it slowly over and over in his hand, the tightly drawn lines around his mouth relaxed, the hardened look on his features softened, until Aurian was sure teardrops glistened in his eyes. "Where did you get this, my child?" and his voice had a far away sound.

"Mr. Berners gave it to me, father. It belonged to his mother. Have I done wrong in accepting it?"

"Girl," and in an instant his manner had returned to its former sternness, "has that dog dared to presume upon your friendship? Has he had the audacity to aspire to Sylvania?"

"Father, you do Mr. Berners an injustice by your words. I believe he is a gentleman."

"Hump! mighty dangerous ground for a young lady to stand on. Where have been my eyes? This New England visit has come none too soon. Aurian, do you intend to wear that pin?"

"Not if it is against your wishes, father."

"Very well. But we might as well have an understanding now. No Durand, or blood of a Durand, shall ever claim a Lancier for a wife while I live, and should he when I am gone——"

He did not finish his sentence, and suddenly a strange look came over his countenance, while great beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead.

"I do not understand you, father. You speak of the Berners and the Durands in the same breath. Will you tell me what you mean?"

"Now that I have been fool enough to let my tongue run away with me so far, I suppose I might as well tell the rest. Esten Berner's mother was old Cal Durand's daughter!"

This startling declaration was so unexpected that Aurian could scarcely credit her senses. In a moment the whole quarrel between the Southards and the Lanciers became plain, and she realized that the Berners were the element of contention between the families.

"If you do not like the Berners, father, why is it you have always so favored Daniel Berners?"

"It does not matter if you do not know. But this is not a pleasant subject to dwell upon, and here we are like two idiots keeping Robert waiting there in the parlor for you. He has something of special importance to us both to say. I repeat, listen to him kindly, and whatever he says shall have my sanction. I told Rosamond I would treat him as if he were my own son. With all his failings, he's—he's—he's a good fox hunter anyway—lucky dog!"

Confused by her father's singular conduct, Aurian left the room to go to Robert with her mind in a whirl. She feared to meet him for the first time in her life. She had always liked him as a brother, and as such he had been always kind and considerate to her. As she passed through the wide hall she saw S'posen Jones rolling on the ground in the yard and playing with one of Robert's dogs.

"Saddle Maze, S'posen, and have him at the door in fifteen minutes. You had better have Gyp ready, too, for I want you to accompany me on a short canter."

At that moment the door was opened by Robert, who said :

"Why, sis! where have you been? I have been waiting for you an age."

"Father detained me, Robert, so if I have kept you unreasonably in anxiety you must blame him."

"He is still in the house, Orry?"

"Yes."

"Please excuse me if I lock the door, won't you, sis, as I have something of the gravest importance to say and I wouldn't be interrupted for the world." He fastened the door while speaking, and then turned slowly to fix his gaze upon her. It was the most trying moment in her life. Robert had never seemed like other boys—like other men.

"For mercy's sake, my brother, what do you mean by this strange conduct!"

"What do you think of me, Orry, anyway? What sort of a fellow do you sum me up to be?"

She was more than ever puzzled, but managed to say :

"Oh, you will come up to about the average of men I should judge. Perhaps if you thought less of the fox chase, you would give more attention to the actual duties of life."

"That's pretty well said, sis. Now let me embellish it. I was a dunce at school, with barely ambition enough to run down the wary fox. But, my dear sister, you must remember that the boys who fail to get the rewards of

merit in their schooldays even up when they become men by gaining the actual prizes of success in life. Look at Est Berners! won everything he will ever possess that is worth carrying home when he got his little tickets for naming a stray river out in Turkestan that none of the rest of us could think of. But this isn't what I have locked you in here to hear! I had no idea it was going to be so hard for me to say what hangs to my tongue by so frail a hold. You won't let me offend you by anything I may say, Aurian, when I tell you it is spoken in the best of faith? Nor you won't betray me, will you?"

"No, to both of your questions, Robert. But we are not to say 'good-by' until to-morrow."

"Orry, I have thought of something that I know you have not," he said, starting on a new track. "You are going up North among those abolitionists, and the chances are you will come back a rank anti-slavery——"

"Robert Lancier, what put that idea into your head?"

"I don't know. It must have been the same reasoning powers that opened to my eyes the great mistake of the South. Do not start, sister; I felt it my duty to let you know how I feel before you went away, as it may be the last opportunity I shall have. Orry, I am going to stand by the old flag in the struggle to come. I know it will be a hard blow for the major, but I wanted *you* to understand just how I came to do as I am going to do. I am almost certain you do not blame me; I am almost certain that you will think as I do before it is over. It is natural your father should think as ~~he~~ he does, but he is in the wrong. Old Maryland is going to be true to the Union, and I am sorry that your father—my father, too, for I have known no other parent—is in the minority and the wrong. I have tried to be a faithful son to him, and I appreciate all that he has done for me. I would lay my life at his feet to-day if by so doing I could add to his well-being, but the honor of my country, never! Remember I have come to this

decision only after long and careful study. Have I been unwise in telling you this?"

"Yes, and no. I don't know what to say, Robert; what to think."

"Do what you think is right, Aurian, and bravely meet the consequences. I may not be here when you come back from New England, for I shall enlist the moment war breaks out. But always remember, though I have been obliged to deceive your father in this matter, in spite of whatever may happen now or hereafter I am unto death his friend and yours. Now, one kiss of parting, dearest of sisters; the next may be given under the seal of blood."

And that was the message Robert had for her! Dazed, bewildered, she left him pacing the floor. In the hall she was met by her father, who asked:

"It is settled between you two, my child?"

Not daring to trust herself to speak, she bowed her head, as she hurried to her room, where she threw herself upon her couch in a flood of tears. One thing she realized in that hour of darkness. Not until then had she known the true nobility of Robert Lancier.

For once Maze was forgotten, and S'posen Jones waited in vain for his mistress to come for the canter that was never taken.

The following morning the tearful partings were made, and though Aurian had come near giving up the trip at the last moment, she finally found herself on an eastern bound train, with the parting words of her father ringing in her ears. She never had a clear conception of that journey. It was late into the night, and she seemed the only person among the sleepy passengers affected by the call, when the conductor exclaimed:

"Machine Falls!"

Rousing up and looking drearily out of the car window into the dimly lighted station, deserted save for two solitary figures, she saw awaiting her the last person on earth she expected to meet—Carroll Southard!

CHAPTER XV.

NEW TIES SUDDENLY BROKEN.

HE WAS evidently looking for her, as he met her at the platform, saying as he assisted her to alight:

"I fear this is a greater pleasure than I deserve, Miss Lancier."

"What does it mean? I did not expect to meet you here."

"Mr. Northup sent me down with his carriage to get you, as he did not dare to be out so late. It is beginning to storm, too. This is my home in Machine Falls, but I will explain all as we ride along. Be careful; there is quite a step here."

The night was dark and a snowstorm was setting in, which if there had been no other reason would have been sufficient for Aurian's failure to see anything of her surroundings. But there was another reason, equally as potent if more human. She was absorbed in Carroll Southard's explanation. For the first time in her life she knew that Machine Falls had been his place of abode ever since he had been sent away from Graymont by the scheming Cuttytower. Here he had received his education: he had begun work in Elias Northup's big mill, to rise from grade to grade, from station to station, until now he held the honorable and responsible position of junior partner of the firm of E. Northup & Co. He was too modest to tell her all this, but she was to learn it later.

"You see I did not have the opportunity to even mention the name of my Northern home during my unfortunate

visit to Graymont this fall," he said. "What a stirring episode that proved to be, and but for you I should never have lived to tell of it now. Let me improve this first chance to thank you for your heroic assistance in enabling me to escape. I trust that Maze got home all right, and that the affair did not make you any serious trouble."

"None whatever; and Maze came safely and gladly home. I was never so glad to see him in my life. I found your note, or rather word, telling of your escape."

"He is a noble creature, and had it not been for his wonderful speed I should not have been able to elude them, for they did press me hard. I wanted to write to you, but I dared not to do it. You may judge of my joy, when Mr. Northup told me of your promised visit, and have waited very impatiently for the day. But here we are at their house. I am sure you will like Mr. Northup and his kind-hearted wife. Ella, too, is one of the most lovable persons I ever met. I owe a great debt to them."

Notwithstanding the darkness of the storm, Aurian saw by the brilliant lights streaming through the large windows a grand-looking, old-fashioned mansion, standing on a beautiful eminence of land and overlooking a wide range of the town lying at its feet. Through a thick shrubbery of laurels and vines, overtopped by a row of majestic elms, denuded now of their foliage, she saw the white pillars of a broad portico. Then a flood of light suddenly bathed the wintry scene in a dazzling halo, making each snow-flake into a jewel of matchless purity, as the door was suddenly opened, and a slight, girlish figure was framed in the opening.

"Miss Northup, Miss Lancier," said the latter's escort, adding as the newly met couple exchanged greetings: "As I have seen the wayfarer to such a good haven of safety, Ella, I will seek my own home."

"Oh, no, Mr. Southard! you must stop awhile, for Miss Lancier's sake if not for ours."

Aurian found Mr. Northup a very genial gentleman, looking much older than her father, she could not help saying to herself. His hair and long, heavy whiskers were snow white. But this might not necessarily denote age, as it may have been due to long illness, or been hereditary in his family. Mrs. Northup was a small woman, with a brisk, nervous way of speaking and moving about, but altogether exceedingly agreeable in her manners. Aurian was given a most cordial greeting.

"You do not look as much like your father as I expected," said Mr. Northup, "but I can see very much of him in your actions. I should judge you might be a pretty tyrant at home," he added good-naturedly.

"Why, Elias! how saucy of you," declared his wife. "Aurian, you must not mind his wicked ways until you get used to them, and then I am sure you will not. I think you must be heavier than Ella."

"Hold on there, wife!" broke in her husband. "I should like to know which has given the greater cause for offense, you with your impertinent mention of a subject that is always disagreeable to a woman of fine sensibilities and I with my well-turned compliment of an independence that every true woman must possess."

"Well, between father and mother you will begin to think, Aurian, that you have fallen among birds of prey that are determined to pick you to pieces. The fact is we have anticipated so much in regard to you, and find ourselves so mistaken in many respects that I suppose we are unduly rude. Then, too, we live very plainly, and we never believe in bringing family cares into the sitting-room, relegating them to their proper places in the kitchen and the office. Since father has given up his business so much to Mr. Southard, you see we have very much of his nonsense. I suppose you were surprised to find Mr. Southard here, as he told us that you could not be aware of his living in Machine Falls. I don't know what father

would have done with his business if it had not been for him."

"You must be tired, Aurian, after your long journey, and I have no doubt you will be glad to exchange our chatter for a little rest."

"Perhaps you would like to visit the mills in the morning, Aurian," said Carroll, as he bade her good-night; "and if so I shall be only too glad to call for you early in the afternoon. I do not suppose you will feel like going any earlier in the day."

Aurian's dreams that night bore a sad jumbling of Sylvania and Machine Falls—the quiet, even tenor of the old plantation and the bustle and confusion of a strange town.

"To think he should be here," she thought. "What would father say if he knew. He seems to be doing so well here," she continued, mixing her pronouns sadly, "I do not wonder he cares so little for Graymont. I do not believe he will ever come back there to live. I wonder if there is another reason for his staying here? She is quite pretty and agreeable, though fearfully blunt in her way. I wonder—" She fell asleep with her mixed train of speculations running at random.

The storm cleared away during the night and the following day was clear and cold, a snowy mantle of several inches in depth covering the earth, giving a cheerless appearance to her who had so recently left the green and brown meadows of Sylvania. Seen by daylight the home of the Northups proved a most happy location, and in summer must be one of rare beauty and picturesqueness. It commanded a wide view of landscape of New England ruggedness, while encircled by the thriving town of manufacture. Just back of the homestead, overhung at places with high banks, dashed over its rocky bed the lively stream that afforded the power for the many busy wheels making the life and bustle and prosperity of Machine Falls.

"We have one of the best water privileges in this land of wonderful facilities," said Carroll, while they were on the way to the mill on the tour of inspection promised. "It is wonderful how this place has grown up. When I came here there was scarcely a dozen houses, and the mills were being built. Now we number over five thousand inhabitants, and increasing more rapidly than at any time in its career. If the people of the South only had the ambition and go-aheadativeness, to use a Yankee phrase, she might be far more prosperous.. But it is a part of her inheritance, coming legitimately with slavery, and she is not to blame. When she does awaken, as she is sure to do sometime, I prophesy a glorious future for her."

"Mr. Southard is very enthusiastic over the South," said Ella Northup, "and particularly that section called Sylvania. I think I have heard him say that he hoped to settle down there before long."

"If I said so it must have been before my last visit," he answered. "I think Miss Lancier will agree with me that it does not look very promising now."

That visit to Northup's mills was an event to be long-remembered by Aurian, and that night in her letter to her father she gave a lengthy account of it.

"I see you have a couple of letters from Sylvania," said Ella that evening. "They must be getting anxious over you pretty soon, or they miss you more than they expected. What a beautiful handwriting this one has," holding one up to Aurian's attention as she handed the missives to her.

The letter was from Esten Berners, and Aurian wondered if her companion noticed that her hand trembled as she took the communication. Nothing new had occurred since her departure. He felt more lonely than he had expected since her departure, but he hoped to remove the tedium of his situation by getting out of doors in a few days. He hoped she would forgive him his breach of good manners in writing first.

In his letter her father wrote that they were "flourishing grandly" at the manor; that he had been at Annapolis every day; that Maze was showing the effects of his vacation by becoming fat! Robert, as usual, was away on a fox hunt. "Strange," he wrote, "that boy can't think less of chasing some poor fox over the country and more of the grave political perils. He has the making in him of a soldier, and I could get him a commission in case the worst happened. Don't let those abolitionists turn your mind, though I hardly expect it of Elias, as he used to be a Democrat and a pretty sensible sort of a man."

To her great relief she had really heard less of the premonitions of war at Machine Falls than at Sylvania. Perhaps that was natural, being so far removed from the source of trouble.

The following day she received a letter from Robert, but it breathed more of the forebodings of the coming conflict than of anything else. "I think it is not far off, and then God pity the South. I dread the hour when father shall know the truth of the standing at Sylvania. Not for myself but for him. I can see that it is going to be a hard blow, and it makes me hesitate sometimes to think that I, who owe so much to him, must be the one to deal it. That alone prevents me from declaring myself. But forgive me for bringing this extra burden upon you. I had looked forward to a brighter ending, but all is dark now."

"My place is at home now of all times," she thought, "and I don't see why father should have sent me off here. I should never have come if that old coat had not turned my mind. I wish I knew the mystery of that."

Despite this cloud, however, her visit was proving exceedingly pleasant. The Northups did all in their power to enliven the passing days. She could not help loving Mrs. Northup, who seemed to her all one could expect of a mother. Mr. Northup was very kind and agreeable, while Ella evidently meant to treat her like a sister. Still, unex-

plainable as it was to herself, she found that she was drifting away from her. She felt aggrieved to acknowledge this even to herself. The affinity which attracts certain persons toward each other seemed not to exist between them. Or was it something else? What? The answer baffled her.

There was no limit to the thoughtful attention of Carroll Southard, and she soon began to chide herself for the pleasure she found in his company. Would her visit have been as enjoyable without his presence? Everybody seemed ready to speak in his praise, and he was certainly worthy of it all.

Among his most ardent admirers was a Mrs. May, whom she met in the Northup household. This woman, though she had been a servant in the family for twelve years, was treated more as one of the family than as a menial. "Why Mrs. May is one of us," Ella and her mother had frequently said. "Don't you think she is beautiful and lovable? So singular that she should be a person without a past. Says she cannot remember a thing that ever happened to her while she was a child! Did ever you hear of a case where a person had no childhood? Some time when you are talking to her, ask her about it and she will tell you it is so. Where could she have lived all those years? I am sure she belonged to a respectable family, for she is very polite and well educated."

Though Aurian had already conceived a strong liking for this woman, her friendship increased from this time. Mrs. May was a beautiful woman, her beauty enhanced rather than lessened by a certain trace of sadness pervading her features, as if some great sorrow had left its imprint there. She could not have been over forty years old, while there was no gray in her golden brown hair.

Aurian found the hoped-for opportunity to talk with her sooner than she had expected, for Mrs. May came voluntarily to her.

"I have heard that you are from the same place that Mr. Southard visited this fall, so I wanted to talk with you about it. And I have another reason. I wanted to ask you where I had met you before?"

Aurian was amazed at this question, for she was sure she had not seen the other before coming to Machine Falls.

"I suppose Miss Northup has told you my strange story, so you will not be surprised at anything I may say. Sometimes I question my own sanity, but others tell me my mind is all right. Your last name sounds strange to me, but Aurian keeps ringing through my mind. And I am sure I have seen you somewhere and at some time. Please describe your home."

Aurian did as she was requested without lifting the shadow from her listener's face.

"How far back can you remember—?"

"There comes Mr. Southard!" cried Mrs. May. "What can have happened that he is in such haste? What a noble man he is! Everybody here fairly worships him. Don't you think he and Miss Ella will make a handsome couple?"

Before Aurian could answer this unexpected question, Carroll Southard entered the house, carrying in his hand a small, yellow envelope.

Anticipating what was coming Aurian sprang to meet him, as he said:

"It is a telegram, and from Sylvania, so I hurried here with it as soon as I could."

Tearing it open with a nervous hand, Aurian glanced at the brief message it contained, reading aloud:

"'Come home at once. FATHER.'"

"What can have happened?" she gasped, turning pale.

"Nothing serious, let us hope. If it had been it would have said more."

"But it must be something of great importance, or he would not have called me home in that way. When does the next train go?"

"One goes in about two hours. But surely you will not think of going before morning."

"I must. If I start to-night I shall get there to-morrow."

"This is too bad. Please remember, Aurian," said Carroll, "the trouble is not with your father, so I cannot think it is so very serious. Let that give you hope. I will see that the team is ready to take you to the station."

Feeling that it would be wrong to oppose her going, the family at once lent their assistance toward getting her in readiness for her long journey.

"It is too bad to break off such a pleasant time as we were having," declared Ella. "I just begin to feel acquainted with you. Besides I meant to coax you to remain until after my wedding. I was going to speak of it this evening, so my little surprise is spoiled. I do hope you will have a safe ride, and that you will find nothing more serious at home than a lonesome old father, who can't spare you any longer. Here comes Carroll."

Tender good-bys swiftly followed, and hastily given promises that were never to be fulfilled, while Aurian was assisted into the sleigh and the robes tucked around her. Then, amid the waving of handkerchiefs and the throwing of kisses, she left the pleasant home of the Northups.

Carroll Southard was unusually silent on the way to the station, but finally he managed to say:

"This is so terribly sudden, Aurian, that I do not know what to say. There was something very near to the hearts of both of us that I have wanted to say, but I have put it off until it is too late. I hope we shall meet again soon. It always seemed wrong to me that our families should have been so separated by that foolish quar—as I live, there comes the train! We have got barely time to catch it."

Five minutes later Aurian had bidden adieu to her last friend in Machine Falls, and was being borne on toward her unknown sorrow at the rate of almost a mile a minute.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

S'POSEN JONES, his gleaming white teeth showing like a bank of snow against a red sandhill, and his eyes glowing like the headlights of a locomotive, was waiting for Aurian at the Knoxville station. With anxious forebodings she stepped from the train, to rush to his side, exclaiming:

“What has taken place at home so terrible, S’posen?”

“Whut! dis yo’, Missus Orry? ‘Fore de Lor’! I wuzn’t lookin’ fo’ yo’. Did yo’ trabble in on de train?”

“If you weren’t looking for me, S’posen, who were you looking for?”

“Dunno! dat am a fac’. Massa Lancier say fo’ me an’ Joe to take Jim an’ sort ob ride down dis way, not knowin’ but yo’ might take yit inter yo’ head to come ‘bout dis time.”

“Aren’t you provoking? What made father send for me to come hoine so suddenly? Is he ill?”

“I s’pec’s de tellumgruf made him send. Dat’s whut he ups an’ seds, ennyhow.”

“Then nothing dreadful has happened after all?” saying this with a feeling of relief.

“Not a t’ing, missus. De ol’ massa is as stout an’ hearty as a yearlin’. But hyur kems Joe wiv Jim, an’ I reckons we soon is off to Sylvanny.”

Though unable to understand the motive her father could have had in sending for her in that way, Aurian began to put her fears from her. And she saw her baggage put aboard of the wagon, while she climbed to the high seat in

far better spirits than she had expected. S'posen was accompanied by another negro, who when they had got fairly started on their homeward journey, asked of his companion in a husky whisper plainly heard by Aurian:

“Hab yo’ broke de news, S’posen?”

“Coorse I hab, yo’ great, greaser nigger, yo’. Wharfo’ yo’ t’ink I bo’n? Massa tol’ me to break ‘em mighty gentle laik, an’ see how ca’m she am.” Then, turning to his passenger, he continued aloud:

“Wese feared young Massa Berners ‘speared.”

“Do you mean that Esten Berners has left Sylvania?”

“Dat’s jess de words I use in ‘spressin’ yit. He ‘speared ‘tween two lights.”

“What made him leave?” asked Aurian in genuine surprise.

“Dunno’. S’pec’s yo’ hear massa don’ broke his frunt toof out?”

“No. How did that occur?”

“When de hurry-scurrum knoc’ de shingle off’n de house.”

“The hurricane! Has there been a storm then, which caused father to send for me?”

“Golly! dem air jess de words I ‘spressed.”

“Was much damage done?”

“Oceans on yit, missus. Knocked ebery t’ing askew at Sylvanny. Dat’s de terrible truf.”

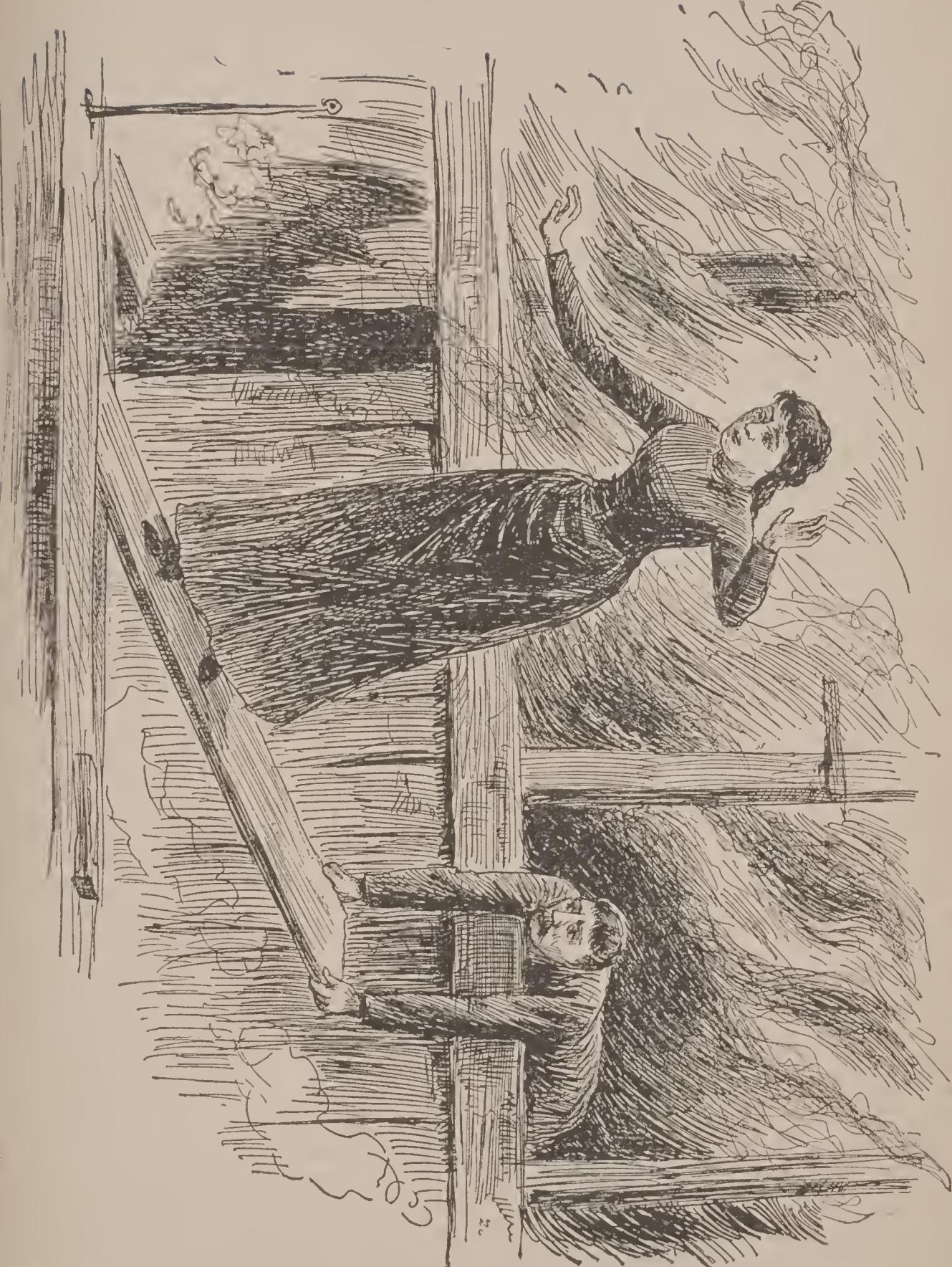
“In mercy’s name, S’posen Jones, what has happened? Why can’t you tell me?”

“Massa go to tell me to break de news mighty gently, an’ dat’s jess de way I’se ‘spressin’ yit. See how ca’m yo’ is.”

Aurian, thoroughly disgusted and angered by this unwarrantable method, seized the whip and flourished it over the darky’s head, crying sharply:

“Tell me what has taken place at Sylvania be——”

“Golly, missus! don’ hit po’ me. I’se got to yit.



“You must cross as quickly as you can, Aurian.”—See page 107.

Massa Robert has jined the Yanks an' fit Massa Lancier, an' massa swore laik a pirit an' kicked ober all ob Sylvanny, an' he dat mad he can't ketch his bref, an' war has come, an' dat's de terrible truf."

Aurian's arm dropped and in an instant she realized the situation at home. S'posen Jones needn't tell any more, and in silent but fearful expectation she rode on mile after mile.

"Golly!" whispered S'posen in his stucco tone, "how ea'm she am, Joe. Won't de massa be pleased at de way I broke dem news? I'se a coon, suah."

Never had the road from Knoxville to Sylvania seemed as long as it did on this occasion, and never had she hailed the appearance of the old manor with so much joy, though it was leavened with sad forebodings of evil. As they turned into the grounds she caught sight of her father pacing excitedly to and fro on the veranda, waving his cane frantically over his head, while he apostrophized the air. At the sound of the carriage wheels he suddenly ceased his incoherent utterances and turned to meet his daughter.

"Why, father! what has happened? Have you lost—?"

"Lost!" he cried, catching up the word. "I am undone! I am a ruined man! To think that he whom I have nurtured as my own child, whom I have brought up to honor the old name, should be the one to betray me, to dishonor us all. Aurian, Robert has sold his body and soul to the devil!"

"Well, well, father, do not let your passions run away with you. He may see the error on his way and come back."

"Come back! come back! never while green grass grows on that terrace; never—"

"Hush, father! all this is very childish of you. Let us go in the house, where we can talk this all over quietly. It is no use for you to get into such a fury. I came just as

quickly as I could get here, and I am not going to desert you again."

Her words fell like oil on troubled waters, and under her gentle administration Major Lancier soon became calmer, though at times, as he described how he had found that Robert had Northern sympathies, the old passion would reassert itself. It was an hour Aurian never forgot.

While in her heart she felt that Robert had acted conscientiously, she felt that he had dealt a most cruel, if not unnecessary, blow. No man could be more patriotic in his spirit than her father, and it was that very love and devotion to his native land and its long-accustomed ways that made his adopted son appear in his mind a traitor to all that was worthy of belief.

When at last Aurian had persuaded him into a more amiable mood, she sought Mrs. Ralston to learn further particulars of the manner of the coming of the storm. The housekeeper showed that she was undergoing great excitement, but after the first greeting she took a letter from her pocket, saying:

"Mr. Robert gave this to me to hand to you, and charged me to let no one else see it. He said it was very important you should get it, and he was afraid it would get lost in the mail. I hope the poor boy will come out all right, but I am sorry for him."

With the communication from Robert in her hand, Aurian had no desire to prolong her interview with the housekeeper. In the sacred precinct of her own room, she broke the seal with a nervous hand. The message was long and closely written, but she read it twice before she laid it down, and then she rested her head in her hands and burst into tears.

Finally, when she had become somewhat calmer, she returned to the missive, and passing swiftly over the first pages, which described his father's discovery of his lack of loyalty to the cause he had espoused, she read, while the

lines grew blurred and blotted from the tears that filled her eyes :

“God forgive me, Aurian, if I have erred in my judgment. He only knows the anxious hours I have passed alone with Him, trying to define the true course for me to follow. I can come to but one conclusion: This oppression of a race is wrong; this division of our fair government treachery to the patriotism of our fathers. Alas! I fear that only when the manhood of the North and the South is struggling in the Red Sea of a civil war will it see its error, the enslaved ones receive their freedom, and the unity of the country be restored. Old Maryland is going to stand by the flag of Washington, Lee and Marion. Father is imbued with the spirit of the misguided few. In his headstrong nature he will not allow any one to reason with him. With him there is no intermediate station between right and wrong, and he denies that I have the privilege to choose for myself, even if I allow myself to be led astray. My only course is to leave Sylvania, until this great difficulty has in some way been settled. Then I may come back, if I am living and the circumstances will permit. I cannot tell. I am going now to Gettysburg, and it may be farther north. If war does come I shall enlist in a Pennsylvania regiment, to serve that cause for which I have sacrificed all.

“How much I am called upon to sacrifice in this ordeal even you, my dear Aurian, cannot realize. I have felt it was coming for a long time, and in my preparation for it I have tried to reconcile myself to the inevitable. I have flattered myself that I would never betray the secret I have carried so long; but at this last moment I find I am weak to do it—too weak! As I have confided to you the loyalty of my heart to my country, so let me confess to you the love and loyalty of that heart to the noblest of living women—yourself! Yes, Aurian, I have looked forward to the time when I might make this confession under bright-

est prospect. When I had lost that hope, I tried to crush my aspirations along with my patriotism, but neither will suffer itself to be extinguished. Do not let me pain you with this hopeless declaration. It matters little to me now whether it meets with scorn or sympathy. In a realization of the storm and separation so sure to come, it is little better than folly for me to speak. None realizes this more than myself. You will naturally believe in your father, and his choice will be yours. My estimation of you will not be lessened by that, and if in the dark days that are to come I can be of help to you, I pray I may be allowed to come to your assistance. My mind will always bear in memory the happy days at old Sylvania, and on the coming Christmas shall I especially remember you all, knowing it will be one of deep sadness in many ways. Whether justified in doing so or not, I shall treasure the thought that the outcast is not wholly forgotten.

"If I have surprised you by this rambling letter of mine, then it will be but a proof of the faithfulness with which I have kept my secret, and if I have been a better fox hunter than a politician, you will now understand the reason."

Very much more was written for her to read, and when she had for the third time reached the touching signature of "Yours unto death," she could not see for the tears.

"Poor Robert! I never thought you would be an outcast from home. It will be a lonely Christmas. We shall miss you, even father. I wonder who is right. I wonder if it is wrong to do that which the heart dictates. Sometimes I think it is father who is mis—nay! I must remain faithful to him."

Christmas was near at hand, but contrary to the usual custom no preparations were made for its celebration. The holly and spruce, pine and cedar were not plucked from their parent stem to deck the walls or wreath the old family portraits. The show of cheerful hospitality so prom-

inent in years past was sadly missing now. Major Lancier stalked grimly through the silent halls without speaking to any one. Aurian remained in the seclusion of her room almost the entire day. Mrs. Ralston declared she hoped she should not see another such a day. Without the weather was almost as gloomy as the countenances within the manor. Dull, gray clouds obscured the sun until mid-afternoon, when the sky took on a peculiar, lurid hue no one failed to observe and speak about. The more imaginative declared it foretold the coming war and bloodshed. Even the slaves of Sylvania felt an unusual restraint, giving over almost entirely the pleasures of the day.

And Christmas was but a premonition of the days to follow. The war cloud deepened, and as it grew darker and darker, men seemed to forget their business to gather in knots on the street corners to discuss the issues of the hour. The lively little village of Sharpsburg lost its thriving aspect; its stores were closed and the owners ignored the trade of those who came to buy the necessities of life. Major Lancier, on a visit to Hagerstown, declared that he was obliged to wait two hours before he could get anybody to put him up a pound of tea, and then he forgot to take it home with him! It was so everywhere. The mechanic left his bench, the farmer his plow, to talk of the latest rumor from the center of trouble. Embryo statesmen sprang up from remote districts to discuss the all-important question, and orators, great and small, were everywhere abroad arguing pro and con what the unlettered masses never fully understood, what the more learned construed into a meaning to suit their prejudices. More bitter grew these discussions and wilder the arguments, until on April 12, 1861, the shot at Sumter roused the North to the startling truth of its situation, and fired to frenzy the hearts of the South. War was at last a foregone conclusion.

Not until then had either side begun to realize the awful

consequences of the dissensions which had been so long fostered. Had North or South been able to have foreseen the heartrending result—the suffering and sacrifice of human life—each must have hesitated before precipitating the awful crisis. But the decisive step had been taken, and there was no turning back from the grim-visaged foe. As Robert Lancier had predicted, Maryland remained steadfast in the Union, though there were many like Major Lancier who openly espoused the cause of the States. He watched the rising storm with the stern determination of his nature fixed in his heart.

“When the hour and the opportunity comes, my sword is at the service of the South,” he repeated to Aurian many times, while she with so much pain in her heart could not reply.

Not a word had come from Robert. She would have given considerable to know where he was. Esten Berners, too, still remained away, and even his father did not know of his whereabouts. Subsequent events proved that he had already entered the Southern army, while the outcast of Sylvania had joined the Northern ranks.

Aurian kept up a correspondence with Ella Northup until about the middle of April, when the latter wrote that her marriage had been indefinitely postponed, and that Carroll Southard had enlisted. That was the last letter she received from Machine Falls.

Affairs moved along at Sylvania without any material change from this time until one fair day in early summer. The weather was so pleasant that Aurian resolved to take a ramble in the outskirts of the wood that hung like a trail to the dark-green vesture of South Mountain.

Accordingly taking Furah and Mrs. Ralston with her she set forth on her little outing. The air was full of the song of birds and the music of running waters. The fields had never seemed to look so green, the forests so delicately shaded, or the wildflowers so sweet and beautiful. Every-

where they went the soft earth was carpeted with anemones, blue lupines, pink honeysuckles or beds of fairy flax, the crushed blossoms sending into the air a perfume that lingered after the fragile leaf had been destroyed. Familiar with every mossy path and every fragrant dell, the little party flitted hither and thither on their pleasant quest, soon forgetting the cares overhanging them.

Finally the lengthening shadows warned them that it was time to start homeward, and Aurian was about to call her companions to her side for that purpose, when the steady clatter of hoof-strokes sounded clearly on the scene. Peering out from the depths of the woods she discovered a strange horseman coming up the turnpike at a smart gallop. As he came nearer she could see by his dust-brown appearance, and the foam-flecked condition of his horse that he had been keeping up his present headlong gait for a long distance. In a moment he swept past them, and the next he dashed furiously into the grounds at Sylvania.

"What can he want?" exclaimed Aurian, while her companions gathered about her. "I fear he bears no good news. Let us hasten to the manor."

Major Lancier was not to be seen when they got to the manor, and it was an hour later before Aurian saw her father, who before he spoke to her ordered Oak to be saddled and bridled at once.

"What has happened, father? Whither are you going now?"

"Be brave, my daughter; keep a sharp watch over the old place while I am gone. Summons has come for me to gird on my sword, and I cannot disobey it. The land of Lee and Marion is once more in danger and I should be unworthy of their inheritance did I not defend it now as they did in the days of '76."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE INVASION OF WESTERN MARYLAND.

MAJOR LANCIER was a lineal descendant of the Calverts, and no truer patriot ever drew his sword in defense of his native land. No summon but the call of honor was needed to unsheathe the weapon that had already proven its fidelity to its country, and no sacrifice was too great for him to make for the cause he believed was just. Thus, without dreaming of the dangers environing the old homestead and her most dear to him, he left Sylvania to the care of women and hirelings, while he went forth to lead a regiment of gallant sons of the South. He depended very much on the guardianship of Daniel Berners, but before a month had passed the latter had enlisted in the Confederate service, and Aurian found herself without even his doubtful counsel. If she had never before she then proved herself to be a brave hearted woman. All over the land she knew was being repeated this sad experience coming to her; family circles were being broken, the members of happy homes scattering to different places under what was then believed to be a temporary separation, but which was to prove in many, very many cases a parting unto death. Thus she looked resolutely forward into the future, keeping her mind in touch with every movement made by the contending armies. Then, there came the intelligence which sent a thrill of terror to many a brave heart in Maryland. Under the stimulation of the triumphs of his first campaign, General Lee had conceived of the bold design of invading the enemy's territory, and he had already crossed the Potomac into western Maryland.

Colonel Lancier, as his commission had made him, belonged to the Army of Northern Virginia, and when he learned of the proposed invasion, he realized as he had not before the hapless situation of his home and those dear to him. "God pity and save my child!" was the constant prayer on his lips.

There was another in the grim, gray phalanx of tattered troops who looked with dread forebodings upon this aggressive march across the boundary line between the warring factions. Esten Berners had at the outset joined Stuart's cavalry, which with a couple of batteries of horse artillery had been called upon to cover the rear of the advancing army.

Scarcely had the Confederate chieftain started on his daring undertaking, when the Union forces under General McClellan immediately pressed forward in pursuit, penetrating into the picturesque Antietam Valley, until further advance was stopped by the massive barrier of South Mountain. Here the Union army wheeled about, commanding a wide view of the Eden-like scene, prodigal in its display of fields of golden treasures ripe for the harvest and waving forests lightly touched with the russet and brown of early autumn, all so soon to be marked with a trail of graves and blasted landscape.

Stuart's troops were the first to discover the presence of the Northern army, and it fell to the lot of Lieutenant Berners to carry the tidings to the commander. But this is a matter of record in the written history of the war. History also tells how the Union army defiled in shining columns athwart the valley to the heights on the east bank of the Antietam; it tells as well how on the 17th of September, 1862, as the mellow light of dawn flooded the fair valley it shone on the mighty hosts drawn up in battle array, when as if the rosy messengers of light were the bearers of the torch of battle the silence of the beautiful morning was broken by the rattle of musketry and the hoarse thunder of

cannon. Our task is to pick up a few of the raveled threads of filling the historian has dropped in the warp of his page. Thus we are spared the description of that sanguinary struggle between the evenly matched armies, which ended only when the rival ranks had torn each other to shreds, falling back in fragments but not in disorder, baffled for the time but not defeated.

Sharpsburg had two main roads running out from the town, one leading northward to Hagerstown, the other easterly to Sylvania, and thence northward along the base of South Mountain. A couple of miles from the east bank the Antietam rises from the base of the mountain, the grim sentinel of which we have had occasion to speak, guarding the entrance to Wind River Valley. Near this point Stuart's cavalry rested the night before the battle, sending out a foraging detachment early in the evening, to which it so happened Lieutenant Berners was attached. But the latter was not in charge of the party or the unpleasant incident we are about to describe would never have taken place.

The moon was in its first quarter, but the sky was sufficiently clear for the foragers to see their way as plainly as they cared, with the Federal army resting on their arms less than two miles away. Like so many shadows the horsemen rode as silently as possible along the sandy road leading toward Sylvania, Lieutenant Berners suffering untold agony as he foresaw the inevitable result of this expedition.

Riding impetuously alongside the leader, he said :

“There are rich plantations off to our left; should we not be the gainers to head more in that direction?”

“What do you know about this business?” was the gruff reply.

“I know every foot of this country for miles, and every place and its conditions. If we keep on this way we shall strike but one homestead for several miles, while just to our

right are many and richer ones.' He said this, as he knew, at imminent risk to himself.

"Unless I have been misinformed, this one plantation is worth more than all the others, notwithstanding your statement. I reckon when I want any information from you I will ask for it, and you will be in command."

Lieutenant Berners relapsed into silence, noticing that they were nearing the collection of negro huts, which bore now a deserted appearance. A little further on he saw his own home, standing desolate in the starlight. A minute later the lights of Sylvan Manor could be seen through the trees.

"It looks like a rich old estate," said the leader, "and what is better, boys, for our consciences, it belongs to an ally of the Yanks. A word to the wise is sufficient."

Esten Berners knew only too well what that hint meant, but he realized equally as well that it would be madness for him to speak. Thus with an aching heart he saw the little cavalcade turn into the broad driveway between the beeches he had known as long as he could remember.

"There are promising stables, boys; take your pick, while the rest of us see what rations they feel like bringing on at the house."

Aurian and Mrs. Ralston, with half a dozen faithful negroes, S'posen Jones and Furah among them, heard the approach of the horsemen, and trembling with surprise and fright they peered out to see who their late visitors could be.

"It is a body of soldiers!" exclaimed the housekeeper. "The army is coming to capture us and—"

"Hush, Mrs. Ralston; it looks like Confederate troops. They can not mean us harm. I am going to the door. See! some of them are dismounting."

Despite the protestations of her companions, Aurian boldly opened the door, when she found herself confronted by the leader of the party, while she could see a portion of the band nearing the stable.

"Good-evening, miss," greeted the Confederate. "We are looking for what we are sadly in need of—rations for man and beast. We trust the best you have you are willing to place at our disposal. If not it will be all the same to us."

The speaker's tone boded them harm, while his action carried alarm to her heart, for he advanced to enter the house unbidden. With what calmness she could command, Aurian said :

"I trust you intend no deed of violence to those who are loyal to the cause which you are upholding. We are only unprotected women here, and—"

Sharp words from the officer checked her speech, as he continued to approach, while confused cries and sounds came from the direction of the stable. With a realization of her helpless situation, Aurian retreated a few steps, and seeing the trembling S'posen Jones standing near by, she told him to hasten to the stable to look after affairs there. Then she said to the officer :

"If you and your men will come into the manor, I promise you the best the place affords is at your benefit, only I trust you will allow no wanton destruction of property."

"Seems to me you are mighty pert, miss, for one in your situation. You seem to forget if we chose we could raze this old building to the ground."

"I do not forget that it belongs to you as a gentleman to see that it is not done, sir."

"Dare defy us, do you, miss, and stand in our way! We have no time to bandy words with any of Old Abe's followers," and seizing her by the shoulders he was about to hurl her aside, when Esten Berners, who could not remain in the background a witness to any further indignity, leaped forward crying :

"Hold! I will not see this young lady insulted at any cost to myself. She has a father at the head of a regiment in Lee's army, and she is as loyal to the South—"

"What! so it is you again!" cried the officer, raising his sword as if he would smite the other. "By heavens! I'll have you reported at headquarters as soon as I get back to camp. Place him under arrest, men."

"Do it if you think best, Captain Graham. I am willing to take the consequence if you are. I reiterate that Miss Lancier here is loyal to our cause, and that her gray-headed father is to-night with Lee's troops in the valley of the Antietam. If that is a cause for arrest, go ahead."

Esten Berners showed that he was very much in earnest, and never had he looked so noble as then. The other hesitated, though the dark look remained on his swarthy countenance. Aurian, trembling for her bold protector, said:

"Do not let your zeal in my behalf jeopardize your own safety, Mr. Berners. I do not believe these men mean any real harm to us. Whatever we have—"

A loud commotion out of doors caused the raiders to rush to the yard, while Aurian followed, Lieutenant Berners stopping behind to speak to her.

"I am afraid you are incurring great peril to remain in this vicinity, Miss Lancier. You must get away to some safer place as soon as possible. Every home in western Maryland is in deadly peril."

"But what will become of the old place if the last desert it?"

"Lives are of more account than property, Aurian. Is there no place you can flee to until this is over—I mean the warfare that is to follow. I will see that you are not harmed to-night, and God knows I was powerless to prevent it or this indignity should never have been brought to you."

"You are very kind, Mr. Berners. I see no alternative than for me to remain here. What is taking place at the stable?"

The noise and excitement had increased, but above all

other outcries could be heard the voice of S'poseen Jones saying :

"Hi dar! yo' look sharp or yo' don' kotch dat fractus— whoa dar! Wharfo' yo' ac' laik de berry deb— whoa! 'pears like dat hoss boun' to git erway!"

Following the negro's frantic cries came the loud hoof-strokes of a runaway horse, while the negro renewed his incoherent exclamations, until one of the soldiers sent him sprawling to the ground with a blow from the butt of his gun.

"You dratted black fool! it was your own clumsiness that he got away. Go and bring him back, or I'll fill your black carcass with lead."

"Jess as yo' say, massa. I'se off laik de win'!"

"What confounded work are you having, Corporal Briggs?" called out the leader.

"It's that nigger. The fool let one of the horses get away from him, or else he did it on purpose. At any rate here are four good animals."

"Surely you are not going to rob our stables?" asked Aurian.

"It isn't robbery, miss, it is the fortune of war. The Yanks are carrying off everything they can lay their hands on and if we didn't take your horses they would. Come, we are impatient to sample your provisions; and we have mighty little time to do it in."

The scene that followed was one too often repeated during the war to need description. Helpless to raise her hand Aurian stood silently by while she saw her home despoiled of everything in the shape of edibles, save sundry portions Lieutenant Berners managed to smuggle aside for her. When at last the soldiers were ready to leave, he said to her:

"I must repeat my warning for you to abandon the old manor. You run great risk in staying here longer. Standing as it does in the very pathway of the armies, you cannot get to a safe place too soon."

"Alas! I have no place I can flee to. How long is this dreadful war going to last?"

"No man can tell; but long enough to desolate old Maryland. I am sorry for you, and I would gladly avert it if I could, for your sake. But the men are leaving and I must go with them. Good-by, and when we meet again may it be under pleasanter circumstances."

"Good-by, Mr. Berners. Remember me to father if you meet him; good-by." Little did either of them dream what was in store for each other before they should meet again.

When Aurian had satisfied herself that the marauding party had really left Sylvania, she joined her companions, trying to comfort them with reassuring words.

"The danger is over for this time, Mrs. Ralston, and we have reason to be thankful that we escaped as easily as we did. Why, S'posen Jones! is this you breaking into the house in that way? How you frightened me."

"'Scuse me Missus Orry, fo' de glorious news I hab. De sojers gone, but dey didn't git Maze! I sabed him fo' yo' bressed self, I did suah. I tell yo' I'se a coon."

"What have you done now, S'posen? Have you lost your wits?"

"Me los' my wits? Yo's foolin' wiv yo' bes' fri'nd now, missus. Hear how I sabed de bes' hoss in de stable fo' yo'. I—oh, dat too good to tell!" and he rolled and twisted his body until it seemed he had convulsions. "Don't git 'cited, missus! I'se comin' to yit laik de win'! Yo' see I knowed dey bound to hab ebery hoss in de barn, an' I says to yo'—I means to mysel' fo' yo'—I says dey shan't hab Maze, an' min' yo' dey went off wivout him. Yo' see w'en dey lead de hoss out, I jess stepped up laik I owned de Sylvanny, an' I say, says I, I led dat hoss fo' yo', c'os he dat fractus yo' neber holl' him to sabe yo' life'. Jess den I drapped a live coal from my pipe inter dat critter's ear, an' den yo' oughter see dat hoss

r'ar. 'Pears laik he'd got 'way from me ennyway ef I hadn't 'tended he should."

Though glad over the saving of Maze, Aurian felt little like rejoicing with the delighted negro, who did not tire of telling of his exploit. But even he became quiet in the morning, when the incessant roar of the firearms of the contending armies at Sharpsburg carried terror to the hearts of all. All through the long, stern battle of Antietam they suffered in silence, dreading the worst. Then, when at last the firing ceased and they realized that the contest was over, Aurian said :

"What dreadful suffering there must be among those who have fallen. Perhaps father is there! Mrs. Ralston, I cannot remain here idle any longer. With all of those I hold dear engaged in this terrible war, there is work for me to do. The suffering need such care as I can give them, and to them I am going. First we will conceal everything of value about the manor that we can, and then we will abandon the place. Each one must look out for his or herself."

It was nearly night before Aurian had carried out her intentions, and everything they thought best to try and save was buried in a pit dug in the cellar. It was then decided to remain at Sylvania until morning, when the parting must come. Mrs. Ralston had decided to go with Aurian to the hospital, where they hoped their services would be gladly accepted. How gladly they did not realize.

CHAPTER XVIII.

PICKETT'S FAMOUS CHARGE.

"We tried very hard to stop Pickett's men from capturing the breastworks of the enemy, but couldn't do it.

"R. E. LEE."

IMMEDIATELY after the battle of Antietam, or Sharpsburg more correctly speaking, Lieutenant Berners, who had done gallant service throughout that sanguinary fight, as a result of his quarrel with Captain Graham at Sylvania, withdrew from Stuart's cavalry to join the 38th Virginia regiment, then commanded by Colonel Edmonds and belonging to General Armistead's brigade of the immortal Pickett's Division of the Army of Northern Virginia. He was given charge of a company, and thus by that little incident his whole fortune was affected and his name became linked with the honor and glory of Pickett's men. Captain Berners did his duties nobly in all the battles and campaigns that followed until that memorable charge at Gettysburg which decided the destiny of the South, as well as the fates of those with whom we are most interested.

The season following the first invasion of Maryland proved one of intense activity. Recruiting was going on in every direction and campfires gleamed in all quarters. Hearthstones were deserted and loved ones separated in answer to that stern summons that knows no favor of persons, that respects no family tie. Inspired by his previous successes, and encouraged by the numerous additions he was constantly receiving to his forces, the Confederate chieftain

believed that a systematic invasion of Northern soil would not only stem the tide of battle but turn it back upon his enemies, and a stronghold established there cause new allies to rush to his support. Should he be able to gain a permanent footing in the heart of the anthracite regions of Pennsylvania the vast resources of that section would then be his and the great network of railroads supplying the coal and iron for the Federal army and navy be under his control. It was an enticing prospect, and the government at Richmond gladly gave him such encouragement as it could. But all this has been told many times.

At this critical period Pickett's men had barely finished their famous round-robin march of four months' duration, passing through Petersburg and Richmond and on to Culpepper Court House, when ragged, hungry and footsore and their ranks decimated by the loss of two brigades,* they were ordered forward on the Pennsylvania campaign, though no man save the commanding officers knew their destination. It was whispered that they were bound on the grandest triumphal march yet conceived in the history of the war. Whatever each man may have felt there was no lagging, no desertion, no disorder, and be it said to the credit of sixty thousand men and their officers there was little or no destruction of property. On either hand the fertile fields offered their tempting bounties, nearly ready for the harvest, and very inviting looked the waving acres of rye and corn to those grim-fortuned invaders, who realized as they had not before the neglect of their own land at the homes where their loved ones were suffering for

* Through one of those unaccountable actions of officials high in power at such times, Corse's and Jenkins' brigades were not allowed to join Pickett's Division on this campaign, though they were really a part of it. Had they been where they rightfully belonged, the number of these troops would have been over eight thousand, instead of barely five thousand. What this difference of force would have made at that famous charge in that little clump of woods on Cemetery Ridge is for the speculator and not the historian to tell.—AUTHOR.

bread. Along streams that rippled as merrily as if the dark banner of war cast no shadow on their silvery current, marched the soldierly hosts, day after day, the steady hum of water wheels and the buzz of machinery keeping time to their measured tread. These steadily moving columns of gray and dust-brown men must have been an awe-inspiring sight to the quiet inhabitants all along the route, and it will be better if they never see their counterpart.

Passing through Chambersburg on the 27th of June, that division of Longstreet's corps to which Pickett's men belonged, after spending the intervening time in destroying the railroad depots and other public property, camped on the night of July 1st on the York turnpike. That night at two o'clock the summons to resume march caused them to hastily break camp and move on toward the front, where fighting had already begun. Crossing the chain of South Mountain in the forenoon, by mid-afternoon Pickett's men were within three miles of the fated village of Gettysburg. The sound of heavy firing now rang incessantly on the air, and the troops tired and parched with their march of twenty-three miles over a dusty road, expected to be called into the battle at once. But the word soon came for "General Pickett's men to rest until word should come for them to move." The men turned in for a brief rest before that deadly struggle which every man knew was surely coming.

It does not come within my province to depict in detail the great battle of Gettysburg only so far as it is necessary to describe the pivotal scene in that Waterloo of the Great Rebellion and the all-important part the heroes of Sylvania acted at that terrible moment when the high-water mark of the floodtide of war was reached. Unknown to each other all of those who had left Sylvania were engaged in that deadly combat. There was Colonel Lancier of the Army of Virginia, already thrice wounded but as tenacious as ever, while pitted almost squarely against him was the Seventy-

second Pennsylvania, to which belonged Captain Robert Lanier, in every way worthy of his name. In another part of the broad affray, doing heroic duty as a private in the Eleventh Massachusetts, was Carroll Southard. Among the slain of Hill's corps lay under the stars that night the stark form of Daniel Berners. Happily unaware of this last sad fact, Esten Berners still found it impossible to sleep. The heavy firing which had continued until dark had died away but he knew that the calm which had fallen upon the scene was all the more portentous for the following day's bloody work. He knew that this holding back of Pickett's "war dogs" at this ominous time meant the brunt of battle to them on the coming day.

The quaint little town of Gettysburg as it was then, nestles between two series of hills and ridges raised to that historic immortality grand and decisive battles give to the ground they consecrate. The group of heights to the northwest comprise Oak Hill, Seminary Hill and Seminary Ridge. The parallel group lies to the southeast and begins with Cemetery Hill, running into Cemetery Ridge to suddenly rise again into Round Top and Little Round Top hills. East of Cemetery Hill is the wooded heights called Culp's Hill. The town is the natural center of three turnpikes and seven other roads, and surrounded by her bulwarks of Nature, unknown to each other the great war chiefs of the rival armies had decided upon it as a fitting spot to concentrate their divided and scattered forces. So nearly was this attempted together the giants had unwittingly locked horns and the mighty struggle was on almost before they had learned of each other's presence! But if a battle originating in an accident there was little of the accidental in its stern action.

The first long day of carnage consisted of the surprise of the Confederate advance under General A. P. Hill, and the Union troops under General Reynolds, who was already occupying Gettysburg. At the outset beating back his

enemy, the Union commander was soon outnumbered, so that he was obliged to retreat from his position, a determined stand finally being taken on Cemetery Hill, where the last act in the thrilling drama of life and death was destined to be made. Early in the day the gallant Reynolds fell.

The second morning found the bulk of the two armies in position for a renewal of the struggle which meant so much to both sides. The Union forces had concentrated on Cemetery Ridge and the Confederate nearly opposite on Seminary Ridge, except General Ewell's corps which lay at the foot of Culp's Hill, two miles to the Union right. General Lee opened the day's warfare by directing General Longstreet's corps upon the Union left, gaining something of a foothold, while Ewell effected a lodgment within the Federal intrenchments on their right. The thousands of spectral headstones peopling the national cemetery at Gettysburg tell only too vividly the sad story of this day and fix its date for all time.

Thus the two armies, bruised and reeking from their wounds, rose in their grim defiance to destroy each other on that third and fatal day. Early in the morning General Meade opened the fight by attacking General Ewell in his stronghold, and succeeded in recovering what he had previously lost. General Lee finding that the firing had suspended after two hours of incessant blazing misconstrued the meaning into an omen favorable to himself. Believing the Union infantry had been demoralized and that a well-directed attack upon their center would turn the tide of battle in his favor, he ordered the grand charge which enrolled Pickett's men on the imperishable scroll of heroes.

From out of the smoke and a curtain of wood concealing the Confederate's line of fortification suddenly emerged the Old Guard of Virginia and quickly marshaled in battle array. Pickett's division was formed in two lines, Kemper

and Garnett leading, supported by Armistead, who was chafing like a war horse at his bit for being put thus in the rear. Noble old soldier! he had plenty of the front before he finished that day's work. Pickett's storming force was strengthened on the left by Heth's division of Hill's corps and two brigades of Pender's division, and on the right flank by Wilcox's brigade of Anderson's division. The combined forces numbered eighteen thousand men.

The day was clear and calm, Nature bearing no token of the strife of men. It was a still calm that preceded the storm of battle. About one o'clock in the afternoon, when the martial lines had tired of waiting, the sharp report of a rifle from the Confederate masses broke the momentous silence, and as the distant woods echoed back the sound, a second gun was discharged. This was the signal for more than a hundred pieces of artillery to belch forth their fiery contents into the midst of the enemy. The sky but a moment before so clear was bronzed with fiery streamers and darkened with clouds of smoke. A host of invisible and rushing spirits swarmed in the air, mingling and making a rhythmic throbbing of unearthly life. Shells shrieked like so many maniacs rushing to doom, and solid shots marked their flight with a whir and buzz, while everywhere the clashing and pounding of missiles lent to the mighty medley of sounds the awful significance of death and destruction. The Union forces commanded a clear range of Pickett's line of battle. It was terrible waiting there, answering it is true the enemy's fire, but so helpless after all. Must this suspense last much longer? Hark!

“Forward! Charge!”

In clarion tone the command rang down the line, and men sprang to their feet with shouts of joy! Nothing intervened to shut out the sight of the enemy's fortified line, so no man in all that hardy band was deceived in the extent of the work expected of him. Each grasped his

weapon with the stern determination of the followers of Ney, "the bravest of the brave," on the field of Waterloo.

General Pickett led his brigades directly on the enemy's front, the three sections moving steadily across the death-swept clearing as regularly as a battalion in line of battle upon drill.

"Firm paced and slow a horrid front the form,
Still as the breeze but dreadful as the storm."

General Armistead improved the opportunity to rush into line at Garnett's left, and Captain Berners thus found himself well to the front.

Waiting for the most favorable moment the Union batteries opened their reserved fire at short range, while their infantry from behind their shelter poured a storm of leaden hail into the faces of the indomitable Virginians, so decimating Pickett's front rank that the scattered fragments reeled. But with the prompt support of the second line the severed parts rallied and uniting moved on. Pickett's men knew no such word as repulse.

Little wonder Heth's supporting division on Pickett's left wavered. Rallied by its reserve, however, it pushed ahead until about halfway across the deadly plain, when it was torn asunder and disappeared "as if blown away by the wind." The same fate overtook the supporting brigades on the right, so when the great charge came Pickett's men were left alone.

Little mattered this to them. Unheeding the signal to retreat, which must have been as disastrous at that time as a charge, and unmindful of the desertion of those expected to rally to their assistance, with only death in their pathway and death in their track, the Old Guard of Gettysburg hurled themselves into the jaws of the enemy.

The eye of every old veteran of those stirring scenes kindles anew, and his broken frame rallies and recovers its earlier vigor as he tells you of that deadly fight down by the old wall where the Confederate commander was

wounded and his troops routed in disorder, though not until Hancock the superb had fallen before the fire of the enemy. Perchance he was nearer the summit, when he will tell you how the Union defenders staggered back and brave Gibbon fell before the wedge-like onset of Pickett's men.

Already it was shown that Lee's confidence in the men he had reserved for this desperate work had not been misplaced. Though the intrepid Garnett had been shot down, and the equally brave Kemper wounded and a prisoner, though the brave fellows were falling like rain on every hand, Pickett led his men across the Emmitsburg road and attacked the Union troops hand to hand!

General Armistead, with plenty of front now, led his brigade toward a little clump of forest trees standing on the very summit of the ridge, and charged on Cushing's battery. So desperate was this assault that the Union commander was slain and the guns captured. But at the very moment of victory, while one hand rested on the captured cannon and the other waved over his head his sword crowned with his hat, still cheering on his men, the brave old soldier fell on the field of honor.

At sight of his sudden fate Colonel Edmonds shouted :

“Forward, boys! once more for old Virginia's hero.”

With the words upon his lips he threw up his arms and fell beside his chief.

A shell at that instant struck one of the trees and bursting shattered the sturdy oak into shreds, long, yellowish ribbons of wood flying hither and thither like so many serpents writhing in the air. The shrieks of shots and yells of men deafened the hearing, while the earth trembled beneath the fearful pounding of missiles and shock of battle.

Already the Confederate flag waved inside the Union fortifications; two lines of guns had been taken; two lines of infantry been dashed back, and all that they needed then was the promised support. But that could not come.

Captain Berners, than whom no one had fought more valiantly throughout that hopeless attack, as he saw his colonel fall, leaped forward, shouting:

“Once more, men, charge! Show your mettle now for your leaders’ sakes.”

Then the handful of gallant, battle-scarred fellows rallied, and for the last time hurled themselves upon the enemy.

Captain, or rather Colonel Berners as by right he was, barely reached the center of the woods before he was met by such a hand-to-hand resistance that he was stopped.

“Die!” shouted a tall Pennsylvanian springing into his pathway with a clubbed musket.

“Men die when they can’t do anything else!” replied the daring Southron, felling the gigantic soldier at his feet. “Charge!”

At that moment a familiar figure sprang before the inspired leader, bringing a wild cry of dismay from his lips.

It was Robert Lancier!

At the sight of his old-time friend and companion the outcast of Sylvania uttered a cry of wonder. The other might have knocked him senseless, but his arm dropped powerless. As desperate as he was then, he was not so far lost to humanity as to slay the companion of his boyhood. The next moment a rifle ball sped past his face so near that he felt its force. His eyesight suddenly left him, everything swam before him, and with such a dizziness as he had never known he dropped unconscious on the very spot of the high-water mark of the battle. The tide at its flood ebbed swiftly and disastrously. Of the brave men of Pickett’s charge not one in four escaped.

The sun that had risen so brightly upon the Confederate army that morning set in a sea of blood, while the moon looked softly down upon the crushed and shattered flower of the Southern army.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE TRUE HERO.

“No more the thunder of cannon,
No more the clashing of swords,
No more the rage of the contest,
Nor the rush of contending hordes;
But instead the glad reunion,
The clasping of friendly hands,
The song, for the shout of battle,
Heard over the waiting lands.”

“Who comes here?”

The slanting sunbeams streamed athwart the peaks of South Mountain like arrows of burnished silver, while the deepening shadows of the approaching night settled swiftly and silently down upon valley and forest. From a pool of stagnant water, dark at midday, the deep, resonant croak of a frog announced him the usher of the twilight, while a moment later in the gloaming of a neighboring woodland, as if not to be outdone, a solitary firefly swung his tiny lantern. The evening air was somnolent with the sweet incense of the spring day.

A carriage drawn by a large brown horse, driven by a smiling, fat-jowled negro of uncertain age, and containing an elderly, martial-appearing man and a young, beautiful woman evidently his daughter, came to a sudden standstill near the junction of the Sharpsburg pike and Hagerstown road at the demand of him who had thus unexpectedly challenged their advance. Their close proximity, unknown to each other until that moment, by a singular coincidence a second party, consisting of one man and two women, and

coming from the westerly course, found their advance as abruptly arrested as the other by the solitary guardsman standing stubbornly in the center of the united ways.

With a tall, straight figure, looking more majestic perhaps for the shadows falling about him, his form clad in a loose-fitting, ragged suit of gray material, his hair long and beard unkempt, clutching with his slender, bony fingers a heavy, single-barreled firearm, he looked wild if not weird, forbidding if not dangerous.

“Who comes here?” he repeated, with feverish impatience, though his eyes were not lifted, as the dual carriages came to a stop.

She with the gray-bearded man of martial bearing in the carriage coming from Sharpsburg was the first to speak, as she recognized the lone speaker.

“Esten Berners! can that be you? Why don’t you know us, Esten? It is father and I coming home from the war.”

“It is she—at last!” he murmured, speaking to himself. “I should know that voice among ten thousand.” Then, louder, he said: “Oh, Aurian! is it possible that you have come back at last? I have waited so long. I thought when I heard your carriage wheels it was the enemy coming to take Sylvania. I have defended the old place faithfully; I have defended it long—so long.”

To the surprise of all he did not advance, but stood trembling in his steps. In a moment his plaintive words explained it all.

“I am blind, Aurian, and I cannot see you!”

She waited to hear no more, but springing lightly down from the carriage, rushed to him.

“What has happened, Mr. Berners?” she cried, as she caught him by the arm. “You do not look like yourself. You are ill. Come; get into the carriage with father and we will go on to Sylvania, where you shall be cared for.”

He had dropped his firearm and folded her to his breast; but gently freeing herself from his hold, she led him to the

side of the vehicle, where with her father's assistance he gained a seat.

"Drive on, S'posen," said he who was coming home from his hard and disappointing campaigns as General Lancier. "Lean against me, Mr. Berners," he added. "I am very glad to see you and I hope your affliction is not permanent."

Those in the other carriage had remained in a wondering silence throughout this strange meeting, but as General Lancier's team moved on the driver started his horse in immediately behind, saying as he did so :

"I hope you will excuse me, friends, but I trust I may be allowed to join you. I am the more bold to ask this, General Lancier, for the good news I have to bear you."

Having failed to notice the near-by presence of these others in their excitement over seeing Esten Berners, their surprise was exceedingly great at this unexpected greeting.

"It is Carroll Southard!" cried Aurian, who could hardly credit her gaze in the semi-darkness. "I am glad to see you."

"I hope I shall commit no offense if I follow you to Sylvania," he said, not forgetting the old bitter feeling of the past.

"I welcome you with a glad heart," replied Aurian. "I am quite sure father at this time will not refuse you his welcome."

"No, my boy; far from it," said the general feelingly. "He who could bow his head in silent submission as I have done and see Lee yield up the sword of the South, can afford to bury all personal differences. Yes, my boy, you are thrice welcome to Sylvania, if you come not to boast over an old man's downfall and sorrow."

"I come under the blessed token of peace, and I bring you tidings that shall lift your noble heart from the slough of despond."

"What is this I hear?" cried Esten Berners, starting up.

"Are the foe coming to trample on our land. We must fight them to the bitter end. Stop ! I must have dropped my gun in the road. But I can find it I am sure," and he seemed about to leave the carriage, when General Lancier held him firmly back, saying :

"Be quiet, my boy. There is no need for guns now. The war is over."

"The war over!" repeated the crazed man. "They have never told me. Then the South is free—free at last!"

"Yes, free, my boy; free with all the land. The North have conquered and we are one country."

"Then that day's terrible work was not for naught."

By this time the team was drawing near to Sylvania, when naturally all but Esten Berners turned to look at the forsaken homestead. It was a sight to chill the warmest heart. Even in the gathering shades of night, father and daughter were only too painfully conscious of the work of ruin and desolation laid upon their once happy home.

"And this is my reward!" groaned the general. "This is a sad home-coming, my daughter. No welcoming voice—"

"Hush, father! let no such thoughts cross your mind. You know you promised to be brave and forgiving. Let us be thankful that we are spared to return. In a few years the old-time prosperity and comfortable inheritance will be restored. Remember the many homes where even this hope does not exist. We will—"

"Fore de Lawd ef dis ain't a sight to bress dese ol' eyes den I doan' know whut happiness is!" cried a well-remembered voice breaking in upon her words, while a huge, misshapen figure, as dark as the deepening shades from out of which it came panting, puffing, lumbering toward them. "Why, Missus Orry! is dis ol' critter los' her min' or is dis really yo', honey? An' Massa Lancier, too, suah's yo's bo'n. I 'clar I nebber see de beat ob dis since po' Frostus died."

"Aunt Debby!" exclaimed Aurian, unable to say more, and jumping from the carriage she threw her arms about the honest old negress' neck, where she wept like a child. General Lancier showed that he was deeply moved, and his greeting was spoken in a husky voice scarcely above a whisper.

"Dis is wuth all dis waitin' an' care. I'se turrible sorry I got no word ob yo' comin' or I'd had sumfin' wuth eatin' fo' yo' supper. Yo' see," she added, by way of apology, "Massa Esten an' I lib powerful clus dese days."

"Never mind that, aunty. We did not expect to find any one here, so we have taken a small amount of provisions with us, and more is on the road with Mrs. Ralston. But there is somebody in the carriage behind us you would like to see I know."

"Halloo, Aunt Debby!" called out Carroll Southard. "How have you got along all these trying times?"

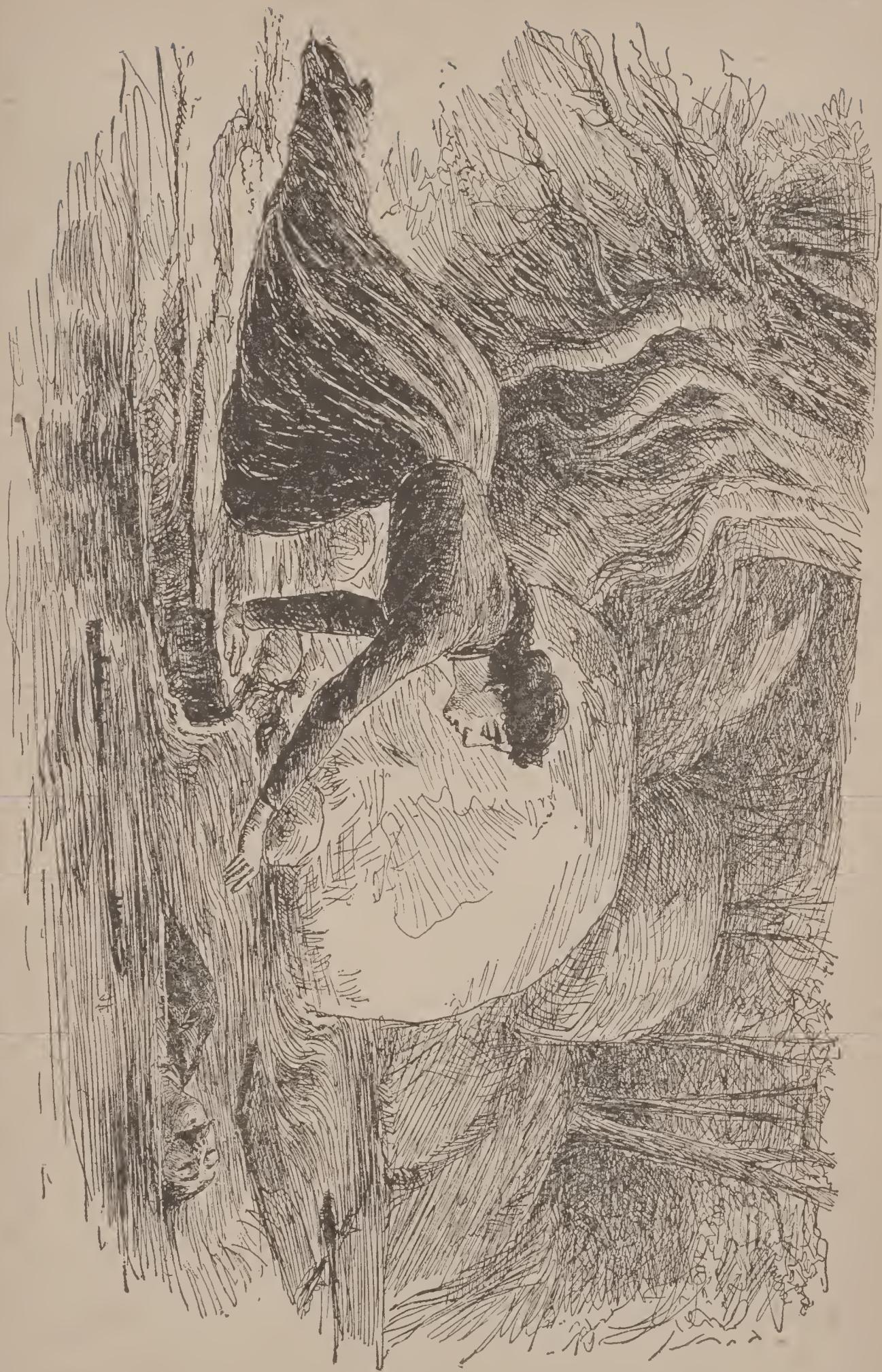
"Who dat spoke? Why bress me ef 'tain't little Massa Cal! When will dese 'mazin' t'ings stop happ'nin'? I nebber, nebber so glad to see enny one in all dese bo'n days."

Aunt Debby's greeting was genuine, and it was some time before she could think of anything else.

"Aunt Debby!" said one of Carroll Southard's companions, leaning forward from her seat so she could lay her hand on the overjoyed negress' shoulder, "I should know you if I had forgotten everybody else. You are the same dear old soul you were twenty years ago. Have you forgotten little Bertie Graydon whom you used to fondle on your knees so many, many years ago?"

Aunt Debby suddenly became silent and she fixed her gaze upon the speaker for a long minute without speaking and then in her excitement she did not reply, but starting toward the manor as fast as her clumsy limbs would permit, she cried at the top of her voice:

"Massa Lancier! Massa Laneier! come hyur quick! Dis



Aurian reaching forward clutched his clothes and drew him to the bank.—See page 110.

po' nigger's gone cl'an d'af, or she's seed th' sperit ob po' little Bertie dat 'speared so long ergo."

General Lancier had driven up to the manor, and telling S'posen Jones to care for the horse, he was assisting Aurian to unload the provisions they had thoughtfully taken with them, when Carroll Southard drove alongside his carriage.

"I hope you will excuse what must seem like intrusion at this sacred time, general, but I assure you our motives were the strongest that could exist in causing us to come. General Lancier, allow me to make you acquainted with Miss Northup, the daughter of your old friend, Elias Northup of Machine Falls. Aurian, I believe you need no introduction to her."

The general's greeting was cordial as could be expected under the circumstances, while Aurian, who until this had not recognized her, folded her in her arms.

"I am sorry we are so poorly fitted to receive company, but—"

"It is for us to make an apology, not you. This is Mrs. May, Aurian. You see she and I have been in hospital service until a few days ago, and she wanted to come to Sylvania and she would make me come with her. I am so anxious to get home, too, but a day or two won't make much difference."

Aurian turned to meet Mrs. May, when she was held in amazement at the scene coming before her gaze. As Carroll Southard assisted his second companion from the wagon, she sprang toward General Lancier, crying:

"I can't remain silent any longer. Calvert Lancier, have you forgotten me? Have you forgotten Bertha Graydon, the wife of Daniel Berners?" Then before he could recover enough to speak or move, she rushed to Esten Berner's side, and throwing her arms about his neck: "This is my son! I know it as well as if you had said so. My heart cannot deceive me. Esten, my boy! after all these dark years, have you no welcome for your mother?"

He received her caresses without moving or speaking. He could not lift a hand he was so weak; he dared not utter a word lest he should dispel what seemed to his disordered brain a wild but happy phantasm of the mind.

"My son," she cried sorrowfully, "you do not know me. I do not wonder, it has been so long, and you were so small. Speak, my boy, and say that you forgive your poor mother for her years of neglect."

"Oh, God! had I one moment's light!" he cried, and throwing up his hands fell prone upon the ground.

"He is dead!" wailed the distracted woman, throwing herself upon his prostrate figure.

Nothing was done clearly during that exciting period, but somehow Esten Berners was carried into the house and made as comfortable as possible. Then, when he had begun to breathe more regularly, the little group of anxious watchers recovered themselves enough to think and act for themselves. Carroll Southard was naturally the first to break the silence.

"General Lancier, this is a happy moment for me. The veil of the past is so far lifted that I see clearly now the dark mystery that has hung over my life. Father was innocent of wrong, and so were you. Let Mrs. Berners tell her strange story."

He bowed his head in silence, while Aurian, listening, waited with a wild throbbing at her heart. Esten Berners at that moment started up, and murmuring something they did not catch, he reached out his right hand, until it rested on the face of her who claimed to be his mother, when he moved it slowly over her features.

"Mother!" he murmured. "How I wish I had my eyes again."

When her new-found son had grown calmer and she herself had gathered strength for the task, Mrs. Berners gave her singular story, prefacing it with the words:

"This is the happiest yet the saddest hour of my life.

Have you thought me dead all these years, Calvert? So I have been even to myself. But let me explain by going back into the past to the day you and Calvin Southard in a fit of passion from discussing that foolish old quarrel between your families agreed to fight a duel down in the old Granary. Mr. Berners, my husband, whom I am never to see again, was to be your second and his. Learning of the affair at the last moment, I rushed down to the place to beg of you both to abandon such a mad idea. Daniel had gone, so I could not speak to him, but unfearing I had started alone. I reached the spot just as you and he were ready to shoot each other. I remember that, but all that followed is a blank to me, until I found myself alone and among strangers in a strange land. All of my previous life was a blank, and never a ray of light came to me until I met Aurian. Somehow her name awoke my sluggish mind, and it kept running through and through my poor head. Then she left this cameo when she so abruptly departed from Machine Falls. That treasure was once a dear keepsake of mine, and the sight of it seemed to set my mind in a whirl. In the midst of it the war broke out, when Ella and I resolved to lend such assistance as our feeble hands could do to the cause for which our friends were battling so nobly. Then, in the midst of the dead and dying, with the groans of the suffering ones ringing in my ears, it all came back to me. All that past to the moment that I fell in the old Granary flashed into my mind in the twinkling of a thought. I was delirious with joy, and as soon as I could I told Ella, when she promised to come here with me as soon as we could. Then Mr. Southard fortunately met us, and he volunteered to accompany us. There you have my poor, simple story; all that I can say in explanation is that it is the truth."

"I was as anxious as she to come," Carroll hastened to say, "for in addition to her happy discovery, I have proof that father was killed on that fatal night by that infamous

Cuttytower. I met him in the army, and he died beside me confessing to the deed. With the great truth revealed at last, General Lancier, I trust that henceforth there shall be no barrier between our families. I am sure that father looks down upon this reunion with great joy."

"Amen," said the other fervently, clasping his hand. "A fearful burden has been lifted from my mind. Bertha, do you know that all these years I have seen the shadow of your death hanging over my life, though in the sight of heaven I felt that I was innocent of the crime. Carroll, your father, Daniel Berners and I all believed that our shots killed this woman. She rushed between us at the very moment we fired, at the same time falling through the old floor into the river. We searched for her body until morning, without finding any trace of it, when believing it had been washed away by the water, we pledged ourselves to remain forever silent over her fate, knowing that if a wrong had been done it could not be righted. What that secret has cost me in silent pain no one knows, though it was purely an accident. Your story has come late, Bertha, and it is strange, but better late than never. The happiness of this hour makes the past brighter. If Robert, poor boy! was only here what a reunion it would be. I long to meet him that I may ask his forgiveness."

As he finished speaking Esten Berners, who had been listening to all this with intense interest stretched out his thin right hand, saying:

"Carroll Southard, can you forgive me for the wrong I have done you in thought if not in deed? I thought my dear mother's life lay at your family door."

"As I did," replied Carroll, clasping the proffered hand in an earnest grip. "We have all much to forgive and to be thankful for. To still further prove my kind regard toward you, I want you to have Graymont for your own. Do not say me nay, for I find that you really are entitled to it as much as myself, according to Cal Durand's inheritance, which he lost."

"It shall be as mother says. Mother, where are you? I cannot see you! I forgot that I shall never look upon your sweet face. But they have told me that you were beautiful, and I am sure you are more beautiful than ever."

"I am here, my dear son, never, I hope, to be separated from you again until at His summons I go hence."

"And now Uncle Frost's story is all plain," Aurian could not help exclaiming in her great joy. "It is all explained even to the old gray coat."

Before a reply could be made, Captain Berners roused up and waving his right arm over his head, shouted:

"Charge, boys! for Armistead's sake. Once we gain the summit and the day is ours. On, boys, on!"

"His mind wanders," said the general. "Give the poor boy the best care he can have. Enough that he should have a life of ease for that hour with Pickett's men."

"His mind ain't been right fo' a long time," said Aunt Debby, who had been a silent witness to the foregoing scenes. "He's 'magined all de time dat somebuddy wuz comin' to take Sylvanny an' he's jess stood on watch. Ebery day he'd go down to de pass to wait fo' de foe. Poor boy, wiv him not seein' a wink, I staid by him an' cooked an' made him as comf'ble as I could."

It was soon found that Aunt Debby had really remained there with him all that trying time. How the wounded and sightless man had reached the old homestead was never made very clear, though it was ascertained that he did not get there until nearly a month after the battle of Gettysburg.

The case of Mrs. Berners is not without a parallel, as singular as it was. In fact, the author has known of several cases of a similar nature, and as whatever explanations might be offered would be but conjecture, it will be unnecessary to advance those. Aurian, Ella Northup, Mrs. Berners and Mrs. Ralston had all done noble work in the hospitals, and to such women the meed of praise cannot be

too full! It goes without our saying that General Lancier had fought a gallant fight, and in his defeat he was sure to lose none of his nobility of manhood. Carroll Southard came out of the long and bitter struggle as he went in, an honorable private. It was in the humbler ranks and not in the lofty stations that the true heroes of the great conflict were to be found.

The war was behind them like a lurid sunset, and as they had been among the foremost to take arms in its cause, so were they ready to set about repairing their shattered fortunes, and restoring the peace, harmony and general prosperity of the country regardless of the convictions for which they had imperiled their lives.

The fate of Robert was unknown, and this fact gave General Lancier more concern than he was willing to show.

"I want to tell him that there were two sides to the great question after all, and I want to fold him in these old arms as a proof of my humble thanksgiving. Poor boy! he has doubtless fallen with the many. Better had it been myself."

Busy days, happy days tempered with sorrow followed, and then one bright spring morning when all Nature was thrilled with her sweet melody and man felt like an intruder into some sacred precinct, the irrepressible S'posen Jones came rushing into the manor, exclaiming:

"I s'pec's I'se got de bigges' s'prise yo' eber hearn on! Massa Rob's comin', but I ain't goin' to tell a bressed soul, eben yo', till he git hyur, an' I larf to see yo' looks."

"Robert coming, you black rascal? Where—quick! show him to me!"

"Golly! didn't I spring dat s'prise on him. I'se a coon."

"I say, where is he?"

"Comin' up de road like de win', mas—"

Without stopping to hear more the general started to leave the house, to be met at the door by a soldierly-looking

man in blue suit and a colonel's epaulets on his shoulders. The left sleeve hung empty at his side, and his features were bronzed and scarred, and he looked much older than the youth of twenty-two who had gone away from there nearly five years before under such a cloud, but the overjoyed man who met him forgot all this, as he folded him to his breast, saying between his sobs:

"My son! my son! I feared I should never see you again."

"Then I am forgiven, father?"

"No, it is you who are to forgive! I was in the wrong. But you mustn't be hard with us in our humiliation."

It happened that they were alone, even S'posen having gone to break his "surprise" to some one else; and when they had talked out their first glad demonstration, Robert asked with a trembling tone:

"Where is Aurian? I hope nothing has happened to her."

"She is in the other room, my son. She will hail your return with joy greater than mine. Go to her at once."

With a strange and undefinable fear tugging at his heart, Robert Lancier left the room, and crossing the hall stood for a moment at the door to that apartment where he had last met her. Gaining courage directly he softly opened the door and entered. As he did so Aurian sprang up from a seat at the farther end of the room and came swiftly toward him.

The curtains were drawn, which made it too dark for her to recognize at once, and while she hesitated he said:

"Aurian, it is I, come at last!"

"Robert!" and with that name trembling on her lips she allowed his one arm to encircle her waist, while her head rested on his shoulder for what seemed a long time. Finally he said:

"You are glad I have come back, Aurian? Father has given me a cordial greeting, and now with your response I shall indeed be the happiest of men."

"You have been wounded," she said, noticing for the first time his empty sleeve.

"I contributed an arm to Gettysburg, and they can't say I shirked my duty. I have come back a maimed and disfigured man, but my heart is as loyal as ever. I trust you will prize that above all else. Did you get my letter, Aurian?"

"Hush, Robert! I had forgotten him in my joy at seeing you. We must not awaken him, for it is his first refreshing sleep," and she pointed to a motionless figure on a couch at the extreme part of the room.

"Who is it?" he asked.

"Esten Berners. The poor man has been through a fearful ordeal, but the doctor says he will recover his eyesight with his restoration to health, and that his mind will then be restored."

Without speaking he crossed the floor on tiptoe, and gazed silently into the face of the sleeper.

"Poor fellow! this is little like our last meeting. He was a noble soldier, but I belonged to the victors then, while I dragged his body out of the track of the trampling thousands." Then a swift pallor came over his sun-bronzed countenance as if a new light had broken in upon his mind. Turning to her, he said:

"You did not answer my question, Aurian. Has my coming in this condition made any difference in your answer?"

"No, Robert; I should be unworthy of the name of woman if it did."

"Then I have not hoped in vain through all these dark—"

Perhaps she glanced unconsciously toward the sleeper; it may even have been an act born of his feverish imagination, and never have actually occurred, for she was looking him steadily in the face, when he paused in the midst of his speech. Eye looked into eye, heart into heart, and spirit seemed to speak to spirit.

"Robert," she said, "you have shown yourself a brave man in the trying times past, are you not equal to any sacrifice now?"

It was a minute or more before he spoke, and then he became perfectly calm and his voice though tremulous was clear, as he said :

"I am," and with that simple utterance, he raised her hand swiftly to his lips, when he silently stole out of the room, leaving her there alone with the sleeping hero of Pickett's charge.

THE END.

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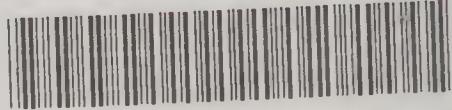
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